

Naristhan/Ladyland: Gender, Nationalism and Genocide in Bangladesh

A Research-Creation Project

by Azra Rashid

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Abstract

***Naristhan/Ladyland: Gender, Nationalism and Genocide* A Research-Creation Project**

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Naristhan/Ladyland is a research-creation project that challenges the selective remembering, silencing and appropriating of women's experiences in the widely circulated images of the 1971 genocide in Bangladesh. As a video, the project juxtaposes the testimonies of survivors and national memory of the war and creates a shift of perspective that demands a breaking of silence. Employing research-creation as methodology, the video and written component engage with the existing feminist scholarship on gender, nationalism and genocide and the archive of the Liberation War Museum in Bangladesh to investigate the dominant representations of gender in the 1971 genocide in Bangladesh. The archive of the war museum in Bangladesh is viewed as a site of institutionalized dialogue between the 1971 genocide and the national memory of that event. An examination of the archive allows us an opening point into the ideologies that have sanctioned a particular authoring of history, which is written from a patriarchal perspective. The photographs on display at the Liberation War Museum offer a crystallizing moment in the national memory; they invoke the resilience and survival of the nation in a war that was largely fought by the men of the country on behalf of the nation. It omits the victimization of women, which did not end with the war in 1971. To question the archive is to question the authority and power that is inscribed in the archive itself and that is the function performed by testimonies in this research. Testimonies are offered from four unique vantage points – rape survivor, freedom fighter, religious and

ethnic minorities – to question the appropriation and omission of women's stories.

Furthermore, the emphasis on the multiplicity of women's experiences in war seeks to highlight the counter-narrative that is created by acknowledging the differences in women's experiences in war instead of transcending those differences.

Naristhan/Ladyland can be viewed at the following URL:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BkBYAaqQYKE&feature=youtu.be>

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1971, during a nine month long war, at least 300,000 Bengali people were killed by the Pakistani army in East Pakistan, which is now known as Bangladesh.¹ This genocide resulted from a long history of discrimination against Bengalis who were considered Hindu-like, represented a distinct cultural group, and spoke a different language from the Urdu-speaking ruling elites located in West Pakistan. Representations of this event have been highly contested and controversial. Additionally, the fact that these traumatic events are open to partisan interpretations suggests the impossibility of a unified truth. Janet Walker argues in “The Traumatic Paradox: Documentary Films, Historical Fictions, and Cataclysmic Past Events,” that “precisely because the past is open to partisan rereadings, there is a dire need to develop ways to understand representations of the past as texts that adhere nevertheless to historical realities” (806). Since the war of 1971, scholars have debated whether to use the term “genocide,” “mass killing,” “ethnic cleansing,” or “politicide” to describe this historical reality (Bose, S. 2011 and Saikia 2011). Each word is loaded with political implications and biases. My research-creation project mobilizes women’s memories through four women’s testimonies in order to create a local remembrance of the war of 1971, and for that reason I have chosen the word most commonly used by the people of Bangladesh: Genocide.

¹ The exact number of people killed in Bangladesh in 1971 is contested. Independent researchers estimate that around 300,000 people were killed in the war of 1971, but the Bangladeshi officials put the death toll at 3 million.

The primary aim of my research is to explore and challenge how gender has operated in service of Bangladeshi nationalist ideology, in particular as it is represented at the Liberation War Museum. In examining the representational strategies engaged in the Museum's exhibition – using archival photographs, news clippings, narrated film footage, documents and artefacts – four women's testimonies are presented to counter the reductive categories ascribed to women of "rape victim," "freedom fighter" and "refugee" that prevail through the museum's displays. My doctoral project employs research-creation as a methodology, and consists of a fifty-five minute essay film that features four testimonies and a written component, which references and contextualizes my research and research-creation process. Specifically, my project engages the multiplicity and specificity of women's experiences in the 1971 genocide to closely examine questions about identity, nationalism and history, the relationship of gender to these concepts, and the mechanisms by which these relationships are transformed or maintained during the time of a conflict. I engage with existing feminist scholarship on gender, nationalism and genocide and investigate questions about the representation of women's stories in genocide. Through an essay film, I document the specific memories of four women during the war of 1971 in order to resist and challenge the selective remembering, silencing and appropriating of women's experiences in the widely circulated images of the 1971 genocide in Bangladesh.

At the Liberation War Museum in Bangladesh, the story of women and war begins with Begum Rokeya Sakhawat: In 1905, Rokeya Sakhawat wrote a short story, *Sultana's Dream*, about a woman's fantastical journey into the future to a place called 'Naristhan' or 'Ladyland.' This imaginary place is a matriarchal society with great

innovation, science, art and beauty. The story begins with protagonist Sultana, who may or may not have fallen asleep while contemplating the condition of Indian womanhood, being visited by a woman who resembles her friend and takes her on a journey to Ladyland where women are in charge. Sultana does not understand the language spoken in this land. Here, traditional gender roles are reversed; men look shy and timid, and are confined within the four walls of the home. When Sultana inquires about this reverse gender segregation, her friend responds, “Suppose, some lunatics escape from the asylum and begin to do all sorts of mischief to men, horses and other creatures; in that case what will your countrymen do?” Sultana answers, “They will try to capture them and put them back into their asylum” (Sakhawat 157). In Sakhawat’s Ladyland, women’s rise to power took place as men were interested in military power and women were educating themselves in scientific research. When men were defeated at battle, women came to the rescue and gained power. Sultana is informed that the religion in this place is based on love and truth. The story, which is touted as an early feminist text from South Asia, written in English and then translated by the author in Bangla – the regional language of the people – is born of Sakhawat’s imagination, but also reflective of a time of British colonization and western influences on education and society. The representation of women in the story follows a narrative of empowerment as they overcome gender inequality and oppression. In the decades that followed the story’s first publication in 1905, there have been many shifts in the politics and representation of women in South Asia as a result of geopolitical movements for decolonization, rights and equality. In Bangladesh, these shifts have largely corresponded with the Bengali people’s internal struggle for identity, first under the British colonizers and then under the Pakistani rule.

Since Rokeya Sakhawat was born in a part of India which is now in Bangladesh, over the past few decades, *Sultana's Dream* has become a widely celebrated feminist text and a part of Bangladeshi identity that not only Bangladeshi feminist scholars and activists take great pride in, but with its narrative, story-telling function in the archives at the Liberation War Museum of Bangladesh, it can also be argued that *Sultana's Dream* is among the first women's stories to be appropriated by the nationalist agenda.

Established in 1996, the Liberation War Museum of Bangladesh has 17,500 items in their archive that narrate and represent the events and stories of the war of 1971. At the entrance of the museum, the eternal flame burning inside a glass casing reminds the visitors of the “fallen heroes” of the war, and the six galleries of the museum display artefacts that present the Bengali identity, heritage, and the 1971 genocide. As Achille Mbembe writes about the archive as “a temple and a cemetery,” the archive of the War Museum also performs the function of standing in as a place where rituals are performed and “fragments of lives and pieces of time are interred there, their shadows and footprints inscribed on paper and preserved like so many relics” (19). The nation's struggle against a common enemy, the government of Pakistan, is represented through reproduced newspaper articles, videos and photographs of men and women carrying weapons. Also on display are personal items of people who were killed in the war, skulls and bones, and photographs of the raped and emaciated bodies of women, which show us the death and destruction caused by war. Susan Sontag writes in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, “Look, the photographs say, this is what it's like. This is what war does. And that, that is what it does, too. War tears, rends. War rips open, eviscerates. War scorches. War dismembers. War ruins” (9). But the images at the War Museum do not seek to repudiate war; instead,

they are mobilized to foster a sense of national unity and necessary sacrifice in the name of the Bengali nation. The Liberation War Museum is not simply a public repository of “archives of horror,” (68) as Susan Sontag has described in speaking of war photographs and their exhibition, but the Museum as an institution has deep-rooted ties to history and national politics as it is supported and financed by the current national government. As a result, the museum through its displays, and the museum’s caretakers through appearances in the media and other public platforms show unequivocal support for the ongoing war trials initiated in 2010 by the same government. The version of history on display at the museum can therefore be considered to be a state-sponsored one.

The events of 1971 need to be historically situated and interpreted at the intersection of the region’s long struggle with British colonialism and patriarchy. The 1947 partition of India into dominantly Hindu and Muslim states, irrespective of distinct cultural identities within those states, created divisions that could not be reconciled. The oppressive policies by a national government that was located in West Pakistan and geographically and culturally removed from the Bengali population of East Pakistan fuelled a nationalist movement for secession, which eventually led to the genocide of 1971. The discourses led by the victors of war overlook the humbling reality and experiences of the victims, especially women, for whom the suffering continues in the aftermath of the war, and that has certainly been the case in Bangladesh. Women of Bangladesh thereby have a vexed relationship to the national memory of this war of liberation. In “Girls in War: Sex Slave, Mother, Domestic Aide, Combatant,” Radhika Coomaraswamy writes about the vulnerability of girls in an armed conflict. According to Coomaraswamy, girls are affected by war in five different ways: as victims of direct

violence, as combatants, as refugees, as victims of trafficking, and as orphans (50). In Bangladesh, girls and women experienced the war of 1971 from all of those vantage points and more: as victims of direct violence, girls were raped or killed; Hindu women were doubly marginalized in a nationalist war of liberation in a Muslim country and therefore became more vulnerable; as refugees many women were forced to flee to India or Pakistan or they were internally displaced; some women were also militarized and recruited as combatants; many women acted as service providers; and finally, in addition to children who lost their parents in war, there were also war babies who were conceived as a result of wartime rape and generally deemed unwanted by the post-war society. Furthermore, the women who were victimized in these multiple ways during the war of 1971, did not all die; many of them survived and continue to suffer.

In dominant narratives of nationalism in Bangladesh, a woman is therefore asked to forget her gender and her ordeal in order to participate in the collective aspirations and collective memory of the Bengali nation in the aftermath of war. As a result of this process, many women found the specificity of their experiences subjected to a selective remembering – through omission, denial and appropriation – to be in service of a collective nationalist memory. This national memory conflates women's experiences into a singularity, whereby, as victims of rape, they were first named "Birangana" meaning female hero and now have been renamed "freedom fighters" who are perceived as having performed a sacrifice for their nation. This renaming of women's experience with rape is a position supported by many Bangladeshi scholars who presented at a conference organized by the Liberation War Museum in Dhaka in March 2015. As well, any representation of the particularities of women's suffering in the aftermath of the war is

generally missing from the discourse. The archival display at the Liberation War Museum ventures to depict wartime violence, but in a way that highlights all women as Bengalis in the first instance, despite their multiple, complex and traumatic experiences. Instead, images that are in view are of women who were raped and killed, took up arms, or migrated to India as refugees. It is to be emphasized that there are no images of rape *survivors* at the war museum, only of women who were brutally raped *and* killed by the Pakistani army. Women as vulnerable individuals who were raped and killed dominate the War Museum's representations of women's trauma in the war of 1971, yet those who survived are silenced. While photographs of women holding guns are on display, testimonies of women show that they were generally not allowed to fight on the frontlines. The photographs of refugees ensure that the war of 1971 is represented as a strictly Bengali experience as there are no images on display of internally displaced Bihari refugees in Bangladesh. As a site of nationalist representation and through the conflation of all difference to the reductive images of the women, the War Museum thereby provokes us to think critically about the intersections of gender, nationalism, and war. What does the violent formation of the nationalist state require? What are gendered experiences of war? How are women subjected to particular forms of violence as women? And how does the Bengali nation represent its formation?

The main focus of my project is to unsettle and disrupt these prevailing national narratives and offer a counter-narrative, which makes space for women from religious and ethnic minorities, depicts the complexities and contradictory experiences of women who chose to fight against the national enemy, and names previously unnamed rape victims. My doctoral thesis builds on Nayanika Mookherjee's research on the war of

1971; Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak's work in identifying the subaltern woman in the history of South Asia; and Yasmin Saikia's efforts to unsilence women's stories from the war of 1971. Building on this existing research, the aim of my video and written thesis is to bring the stories of survivors into the existing discourse on genocide. My project seeks to make an intervention into the nationalist account of the 1971 genocide that remains gendered and forces a double marginalization – first during the war and then in the post-war narratives – on women rape survivors, freedom fighters, religious, and ethnic minorities. Using testimonies of survivors, I attempt to create a shift of perspective that demands a breaking of silence. Additionally, even though the specificity of gendered wartime experience runs as a common theme, there are nuances that cannot be ignored. These nuances involve the intersectionality of race, class, and religion. A feminist study of women's experiences in the 1971 genocide in Bangladesh demands that all experiences, or as many as possible, are included in the counter-narrative along with the ethnic, religious or class boundaries that are often seen as burdening the analysis.

This work is constituted by my combined doctoral research and my practice as a filmmaker. It works with scholarly texts on gender, nationalism and politics of representation, in addition to audio and visual material, archives and testimonies. Photographs, video and audio clips from the archives and survivors' testimonies are carefully selected and juxtaposed in film form to highlight the instances where omissions and appropriations have taken place in the national memory. Creating a film, in addition to a written thesis, and making it available to the general public along with academics is an endeavour to make research widely accessible and contributes to the public memory of the war of 1971. In so doing, I agree with Waterson as she emphasizes in "Trajectories of

Memories” that the importance of creating a film is “both in multiplying the available points of view on the historical record, and in working against either the kind of heedless forgetting that comes about through indifference, or the active political suppression of memories considered to be uncomfortable by those in positions of power” (56). The hierarchy in national memory that seeks to select the stories that are worth remembering also subjects others to oblivion. Taking a reflexive approach, my film documents the politics of documentation for the purpose of remembering. It offers a layering of “official” facts, images and texts to create meaning of experiences that remain outside the national discourse.

In 2014, I visited Bangladesh for my first research trip and interviewed several female survivors of the war from different ethnic and religious backgrounds who have contributed the central testimonies that make up my film. The women included Pratiti Devi Ghatak, Aroma Dutta, Saira Bano, Ferdousi Priyubhashini, and Sultana Kamal. I examine the testimony of Pratiti Devi Ghatak and Aroma Dutta, Hindu women survivors of the war of 1971, with complex relationships to a national identity that seeks to exclude the experiences of religious minorities from the dominant narrative on the war of 1971. Saira Bano is a female survivor and a refugee from the enemy side. Saira Bano’s story helps us to understand that in nationalism women are not only assigned a specific role and their stories appropriated to serve the nationalist agenda, but also that some stories can be completely erased from the memory. Ferdousi Priyubhashini is an artist and a survivor of wartime rape. Ferdousi’s story highlights a nation’s continuing uncomfortable relationship to women and rape. Sultana Kamal, a service provider during the war of 1971 and currently the Executive Director of a non-governmental organization, brings to

this research project an important understanding of the way in which women's lives are militarized in general and in particular, the marginalization that female freedom fighters in Bangladesh have endured. The four unique vantage points from which testimonies are offered show the multiplicity of women's experiences in war and a coming together, without being asked to transcend their differences. By sharing their memories, the survivors ensure that their stories will not be forgotten and will become part of a longer and collective life in the form of this project. The fifth vantage point in this project belongs to me. In my doctoral research, the subjectivities of the interviewees and my own have resulted in moments of negotiation, reflection and analysis. As a feminist filmmaker, researcher, and a woman from Canada who was born in Pakistan to parents who were born in East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, and grandparents who were from India and came to be known as Urdu-speaking Biharis in East Pakistan, negotiations had to take place on more occasions than I had anticipated; many a time during fieldwork and post-production, I had moments of reflection on my own subjectivity in this project; and all these things have come together as an exploration and analysis of relationships that are often uncomfortable and complex. In my film, the subject positions of the researcher, the survivors of genocide, and the viewers, engage in a dialogic relationship in order to construct an alternative and more inclusive account of history than the one currently in circulation.

The written component of my thesis is divided into eight chapters. Since my research attempts to resist and challenge the national memory of the war, in Chapter 2 I provide some historical background and events that led to the war of 1971. Chapter 3 frames the theoretical underpinnings of my research. Dealing with questions of gender

and nationalism, I examine some of the works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1994, 2010) and Benedict Anderson (2006), conceptualizing nationalism within the realm of imagination. While Spivak questions the limited history and future of nationalism, Anderson provides a discussion of the way the colonial state imagined its dominion with the census, the map, and the museum. The colonial legacy has been carried forward by most, if not all, post-colonial states and that has certainly been the case in South Asia. Teresa de Lauretis' articulation of gender as a representation (1987) and Joan W. Scott's concept of gender as a social relation (1986) offer an opening into a discussion of nationalism and gender, which leads into an exploration of Third World nationalist feminism. This chapter also deals with the question of gendered violence committed in the name of nationalism and genocide, and provides some of the key instances of genocide in the twentieth century, from the Holocaust to the former Yugoslavia. This section ends with an exploration of violence done to women in the writing of history. Chapter 4 delves into the archives of the war museum as a site of consignment and power, and focuses on visual culture and the politics of representation in the images of genocide. In addition to discussing war museums and their archives as sites of institutionalized dialogue between war and the national memory of that war, I reference Cornelia Brink's research on iconic images to investigate memorialized and widely circulated images of war. Many researchers and filmmakers in the past have explored different representational strategies to make visible not only gendered experiences of war but also the differences within those experiences. In Chapter 5 "Representation and Documentary Film," I explore the existing research on representations of gender through various modes of documentary film, specifically the essay film as it makes room for an

expression of subjectivity and accountability. By foregrounding the subjectivity and authorial voice of the filmmaker, the essay film offers a subjective representation of reality and renders itself particularly useful to feminist researchers who are trying to negotiate and represent an insider/outsider dynamic. By making visible the articulation and subjectivity of the filmmaker, the essay film creates transparency and accountability for a specific positioning of a knowing self. Chapter 6 of this thesis deals with my methodology, namely research-creation. After providing a theoretical framework for my research, I discuss my personal connections to this project as a way of foregrounding the essayistic subjectivity and discuss the process of research-creation and the ground reality of doing this kind of work in Bangladesh in a highly unstable and unsafe political environment, and the compiling of the film and this thesis. My skills as a researcher and documentary filmmaker along with the existing research and audio/visual material on women and the war of 1971 in Bangladesh lay out the groundwork for this project. This chapter emphasizes the connection between the written component of my thesis and the film. Chapter 7 features the four stories of resistance and an exploration of their relationship to the national memory of war. This section comprises original interviews with survivors and an investigation into the archives, which constructs the bulk of my research fieldwork. In an attempt to challenge the forced anonymity of women survivors and to bridge the distance between oral history collected through audio/visual material and the written thesis, I include photographs of the survivors and my analyses of their testimonies. My thesis concludes with a photograph from Marc Riboud taken in 1971 in Dhaka in the aftermath of one of the massacres. In that photograph, ascertaining the identity of the women in the photograph has been an impossible task, as their identities

have been politicized and subjected to selective remembering and appropriation. The concluding remarks acknowledge the trans-local and political nature of this research project as it creates a site where multiple subjectivities and testimonies come together to investigate the omissions in memory and for the re-telling of the story of 1971.

The name of my project, “Naristhan/Ladyland” is borrowed from Rokeya Sakhawat’s story *Sultana’s Dream*, as the land imagined by Sakhawat remains as fictitious today as it was a hundred years ago. The representation of gender in Sakhawat’s story can be brought into question for necessitating an overcoming of gender, reversal of gender roles, and unproblematic relationship of women to nation. The narrative constructed in *Sultana’s Dream*, about women overcoming their gender and fighting the national enemy, bears some similarities to the one represented at the Liberation War Museum, which through images of women carrying guns also shows that in the war of 1971 women overcame their gender and fought the Pakistani army. Ladyland as a place where gender roles have been reversed and patriarchy has been replaced by matriarchy is also a representation that remains problematic for feminist thought. Moreover, Sakhawat’s Ladyland is a place where women’s relationship to nation is never brought into question and the feminized space of home is extended to become the nation or Ladyland. Despite all these issues, the value of this text and her emphasis on education are rooted in the historical circumstances that demanded ideological and material changes in the Indian society. Even though *Sultana’s Dream* was originally part of the movement towards women’s emancipation, the political backdrop for the story was a nationalist struggle against the British colonizers. As seen in South Asia, the nationalist struggle against a common enemy forces the questioning of gender’s relationship with nationalism

to take a backseat. *Sultana's Dream*, for all its creativity, imagination and attempt at empowering women over a hundred years ago is an important text even if Ladyland is not exactly the feminist utopia that many would like to believe it to be. The name is used here as a referent to a text and a place that remains meaningful to the people of Bangladesh. Ladyland for its unresolved and problematic relationship with gender is an appropriate title for a project that seeks to problematize women's relationship to nation, the violence endured by women in the name of the nation and in the writing of its history. Through this project, I hope to highlight women's stories of the violence they faced in the name of nationalism and in the writing of national history and make an intervention in the national memory of the war of 1971. For the survivors, myself and, hopefully, for the viewers, this project will offer a moment to remember and reflect in the face of national forgetting.

Chapter 2

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The 1971 genocide in Bangladesh took place as a result of the region's long history of colonization, the 1947 partition of the Indian subcontinent into largely Muslim Pakistan and Hindu India, and the continuation of ethnic and religious politics in Pakistan, specifically the political suppression of the Bengali people of East Pakistan. The following section provides a brief overview of some of the key events that led to the nine months long war of liberation in the region.

Bangladesh or “Bengal nation” has a limited history in the region of South Asia. Before the British colonization of the subcontinent, India comprised many independent Hindu and Muslim kingdoms and empires. The British colonizers are sometimes credited with unifying these independent states into one country. Research shows that prior to the twentieth century Hindu or Muslim nationalism in the sub-continent lay dormant, if not entirely non-existent (For example: Aneesh 2015, Radhakrishnan 1996). Despite a history of living together for hundreds of years, in the early twentieth century Muslim leaders of the sub-continent put forth what came to be known as the “Two-nation” theory, which stipulated that Hindus and Muslims were separate nations based on ethnicity and religion. This ideology of “nation” eventually led to the partition of 1947, creating a largely Hindu India and the Muslim state of Pakistan. It also resulted in the mass migration of millions of people across the newly created nation-states. In the space of a few months in 1947-48, an estimated twelve million people moved between the new nations of India and East and

West Pakistan. It is estimated that up to a million people were killed in the process of migration.

After the partition of 1947, the struggles for nationhood were far from over. The newly-born state of Pakistan was divided into East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and West Pakistan (now the Islamic Republic of Pakistan) with miles of Indian land stretched in between and insurmountable cultural and linguistic differences. In Pakistan, a country founded in the name of Islam, there were more than 15,000,000 Hindus, almost all of them residing in East Pakistan (Mascarenhas 8). And the most-widely-spoken language in East Pakistan was Bengali. In the aftermath of mass killings that took place during the 1947 partition, religion was not going to hold the country together. The leaders in East Pakistan (most prominent of whom was Dhirendranath Dutta, grandfather of one of my interview subjects) therefore looked towards language to unite the diverse religious communities in East Pakistan. While West Pakistan was dominated by Punjabis with a small population of Sindhi, Pathan and Baluchi nationals and an influx of Urdu-speaking immigrants from India, East Pakistan comprised a predominantly Bengali-speaking population and some immigrants from the northern Indian state of Bihar, the Biharis. The Bengalis of East Pakistan constituted an estimated 54 percent of Pakistan's entire population (Pakistan Period, 1947-71). But the demand to make Bengali the official language of the country was met with strong resistance by the government, which was located in the Urdu-speaking West Pakistan. The government banned many Bengali poets, enforcing an active policy of suppression of a distinctive Bengali identity, including language and culture. Moreover, the economic disparities between East and West Pakistan proved to be crippling for the region.

The agricultural riches of the country were in East Pakistan but the government was located in West Pakistan. The government extracted the revenues without investing in the people and economy of East Pakistan. Most of the industrial and commercial enterprises in East Pakistan were owned by rich families from West Pakistan, resulting in a sizeable net transfer of wealth from East to West. In his book, *The Rape of Bangladesh*, Anthony Mascarenhas writes about his many trips to East Pakistan as a journalist and seeing dire poverty, malnourishment and diseases in the cities and in the countryside. The poor living conditions of the population in East Pakistan was only exacerbated by the lack of employment opportunities in the public sector where Bengalis saw a preferential treatment being given to the Urdu-speaking migrants from India. The Bengalis hoped that through fair election and political representation they would be able to enjoy equal shares in economic distributions and decision-making.

The promise of an election in 1958 never materialized as the Prime Minister of the country was ousted in a military coup led by General Ayub Khan. In the 1965 election, which was largely considered rigged as many influential politicians of East Pakistan were disqualified from holding public office or associating themselves with any political activity, General Ayub Khan was re-elected (Sayeed 80). General Ayub Khan mirrored the view of West Pakistan in seeing Bengalis as a conquered and subordinate race. In his political autobiography, *Friends Not Masters* (1967), General Ayub Khan wrote the following about the people of East Pakistan:

As such they (East Bengalis) have all the inhibitions of down trodden races and have not yet found it possible to adjust psychologically to the requirements of the newborn freedom. The population in West Pakistan, on the other hand, is probably the greatest mixture of races found anywhere in the world. Lying on the gateway to the Indian subcontinent, it was

inevitable that such successive conquering race should have left its traces here. Consequently, this forced mixture of races has brought fusion of ideas, outlooks, and cultures, and despite the linguistic variety that obtained. (Qtd in Haque 213).

By 1966, as a result of the grievances originating from inequitable distribution of resources, economic exploitation, and a lack of political representation in national government, the political leadership of East Pakistan, including the Awami League, had already begun making demands for secession. Economic disparities reached a new high, and amid political turmoil General Ayub Khan resigned in 1969 and was replaced by General Yahya Khan. General Yahya Khan put forward a framework for a general election to be held on 5 October 1970, which was postponed till 7 December 1970. In November 1970, East Pakistan was hit by a devastating cyclone, which claimed more than half a million Bengali lives (Haque 224). The flood-stricken people received no relief from the national government, bringing to the forefront the government's general attitude of indifference towards the people of East Pakistan. In the elections held in December, the Awami League under the leadership of Sheikh Mujib won an absolute majority but the politicians in West Pakistan refused to transfer power. The events triggered the nine-months-long war of independence, which came to an end with the military support of neighbouring India. On 16 December 1971, Bangladesh, meaning "Bengal nation," was created. The number of people killed in the war ranges from hundreds of thousands to three million. It is also estimated that ten million people became refugees, several hundred thousand Biharis became "stateless" in Bangladesh and Pakistan, and close to 200,000 women were raped.

In 1973, the government of Bangladesh enacted the *International Crimes (Tribunals) Act* to prosecute "those who committed, directly or indirectly, genocide,

crimes against humanity, and other war crimes” in the war of 1971 (Islam 72). Several influential leaders from the religious political party, Jamaat-e-Islami, were arrested for committing war crimes and/or collaborating with the perpetrators in 1971. But the trials came to a halt after the country’s nationalist leader from the war of 1971, founding father and president, Sheikh Mujib was assassinated in 1975. In 1996, when Awami League came to power, now under Sheikh Mujib’s daughter, Sheikh Hasina’s, leadership, the foundation of the Liberation War Museum of Bangladesh was laid to commemorate the war of liberation. The Liberation War Museum has enjoyed the financial support of the Awami League government and in return lent its support to the war trials that were initiated in 1973 and resumed in 2010 by Sheikh Hasina’s Awami League. While the Awami League found support among war survivors and freedom fighters, their political rivals made an alliance with the Jamaat-e-Islami; some of the top politicians of the Jamaat had been accused of collaborating with the Pakistan army and committing war crimes.

After a highly controversial re-election of the Awami League to the office in 2014, several war criminals were convicted and executed, launching a nationwide protest by the opposition, which had an alliance with Jamaat-e-Islami. According to the *BBC*, four men have so far been executed for various crimes related to 1971, three of whom were leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami. There are many more who are currently on death row, awaiting court decisions (“Bangladesh war crimes trial: Key accused” *BBC News*). These war trials have proved to be a dividing force in a country struggling with poverty and rise of religious fundamentalism. The survivors of the war support the trials as a way to seek justice for the atrocities committed in 1971, while the opposing side questions the

political motivations behind these trials and the independence and impartiality of the judges and fairness of the process – a concern shared by human rights advocates. When the Islamist leader Abdul Kader Mullah was sentenced to death for war crimes, the UN human rights commissioner Navi Pillay wrote to the Bangladeshi authorities urging them to stay his execution, as the trial had not met the international standards required for the death penalty (“Bangladesh Islamist Abdul Kader Mullah hanged for war crimes” BBC News). Meanwhile, the museum continues to extend unequivocal support to the war trials, and the museum board members have appeared on numerous national and international platforms, including television programs and academic conferences, to highlight the need for the war trials and defending the transparency of the process.

The trials have brought to the forefront the country’s deeply rooted divide between religious and secular elements. Many international news media, such as the *New York Times*, *Guardian*, *Washington Post*, *Globe and Mail*, etc., have been reporting on the increase in deadly attacks on secular elements in the country and a rise in activities by fundamentalist Islamic groups. The *New York Times* reports that in 2015 four Bangladeshi intellectuals who spoke out against fundamentalist Islam were assassinated, along with international aid workers and dozens of innocent civilians in sporadic attacks, and the Islamic State claimed responsibility after each attack (Barry, The New York Times). The *NYT* also reports that the country’s Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, has denied the existence of the Islamic State in Bangladesh and blames the violence on the opposition leaders’ conspiracy to damage her country’s reputation (Barry, “Bangladesh Pushes Back as Warnings of ISIS Expansion Gather Steam” Web). The rise of religious fundamentalism in Bangladesh must be understood as a historical process as Pakistan was

created in 1947 in the name of religion. Even though Bangladesh has been able to liberate itself from Pakistan, obliterating its ties to religious elements has proved much more difficult.

Undoubtedly, Bangladesh presents a complex history of the struggle of a people – first against the British colonizers, then against the government of Pakistan – and in that struggle not everyone suffered the same violence. But the national memory of the war, on display at the Liberation War Museum simplifies history in the name of nationalism. What is emphasized in the display at the Liberation War Museum of Bangladesh is that this kind of crime was committed against the Bangladeshi nation by the common enemy, the Pakistani army. The history of the war is told from a national perspective, which is also patriarchal. While the images of women holding guns are on display, the inability of female freedom fighters to find an entry point in a male dominated war is not represented at the museum. Women's lives are obscured but their deaths are highlighted in the numerous framed pictures of anonymous raped, tortured and murdered women. These images make the identity of the women, photographed in their most vulnerable moments, of secondary importance. These mediated images of war contain an untold history of women and how meanings and bodies are produced for nationalist discourses. The representations of gendered experiences of war at the museum bring to the surface questions about women's relationship to nation, the violence endured by women in war and in the writing of national history.

Chapter 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

In my doctoral research, I am interested in investigating the violence endured by women in the name of nationalism and then again in the construction of the nationalist history. In particular, my research deals with the manner in which a woman's story is told in the context of war, who is telling the story, for what purpose, and how the differences within the category "women" are brought into the fold. Women's Studies has flourished considerably in Bangladesh in the last four decades since the war of 1971. The existing Bangladeshi feminist scholarship, however, deals to a great extent with development issues, emphasizing the need for education and employment for women. Development initiatives that empower women in their struggle against gender inequality have been a central focus for feminist researchers and movements in Bangladesh. This concern is mirrored in a particular framing of gender politics and Bangladesh in scholarly discussions regarding the growth in the non-governmental sector. Feminist scholars such as Elora Halim Chowdhury (2011) and Hameeda Hossain (1997) have made a significant contribution by emphasizing the complex and often contradictory roles played by the non-governmental organizations in fostering relationships with state and non-state actors. The Western feminist scholarship, emerging parallel to the development-centered feminist discourses of Bangladesh, deals predominantly with questions of location, privilege, and anti-colonial struggles. They have put into question the very relationship of gender with the state by arguing that the development of state institutions and processes have had overtly patriarchal tones. Cynthia Enloe (2000), in particular, has written

extensively about the militarization of state institutions and the violence done to women in the name of nationalism. The contribution of Western academics has not gone unnoticed and has resulted in some feminist researchers in Bangladesh and India reinscribing women back into the nationalist struggles as victims and participants. Durba Ghosh's work on female revolutionaries in India's struggle against the British colonizers is one example (2013). But that work fails to see the gender dimensions of nationalist movements in South Asia, the violence endured by women as *both* victims and participants in those movements, and the marginalization of women that takes place in the writing of history. For these reasons, more relevant for my current research undertaking are the existing works of Yasmin Saikia (2007, 2011), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1981, 1993, 1994, 2010) and Nayanika Mookherjee (2012, 2015) – Third World and feminist academics located in North America – who have challenged the current discourses of history and attempted to put women at the centre of history-writing in South Asia. My research utilizes theoretical concepts, including gender and nationalism, developed by Western academics and puts them at the service of countering history in Bangladesh. In that attempt, my work, the film and the written thesis, seeks to make a contribution to the existing discourses on gender, nationalism and history in Bangladesh. My research offers a counter-narrative to the nationalist narrative on women and war in circulation in Bangladesh today.

This literature review is intended to establish some of the themes that situate my current research on representations of the 1971 genocide in Bangladesh within the broader feminist and cultural studies scholarship. Given the immensity of the literature that exists on gender, nationalism and genocide, my focus in this literature review is to

guide the reader's attention to the various conceptual building blocks of this work. The concept of the nation as an imagined community, developed by Benedict Anderson (2006), and Postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's work on nationalism as a product of imagination (2010) helps to situate gender within this imagined community. Feminist researchers Teresa de Lauretis (1981) and Joan W. Scott's (1986) articulation of gender as a representation and social category, Chandra T. Mohanty (2003) and Inderpal Grewal's emphasis on the local histories and the needs of non-western, non-white women (1994), and Kimberle Crenshaw's articulation of intersectionality (1991) provide important foundations for this research. Kumari Jayawardena's work on post-colonial Third World Feminism helps us understand the way gender is implicated in nationalism, specifically in the South Asian context. What follows is a discussion on the gendered violence of nationalism and genocide. Finally, this section examines history as the perpetrator and the museum as a site of history.

Nation, Nationalism and the Imagination

Nationalism, rooted in the word nation, binds individuals to an imaginary homeland by the virtue of shared characteristics, ethnicity and landscape. Ethnicity, according to anthropologist Fredrik Barth (9-37), is a process of maintaining boundaries between the dominant group and the 'other'. Through the process of inclusion and exclusion, the outsiders and insiders are decided, and boundaries are created. As seen in the history of nationalism in the Indian subcontinent, this process of creating boundaries is not grounded in objective cultural difference but in identification of all members of the group as having shared values and mutual interests. Benedict Anderson has written

extensively about the nation as an imagined political community. In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson writes that the nation is, “*imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion... it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (6). Within these communities, membership is granted through birth or other means of coming together to promote unity and progress – culturally, economically and biologically – among its members. In this process, the state becomes a set of institutions with control and dissemination of resources necessary for the progress of its people, and exclusion of non-members as the ‘other’ from the nationalist identity. In *Nationalism and the Imagination*, Spivak writes, “State formations change but the nation thing moves through historical displacement ... The putting together of nationalism with the abstract structure of the state was an experiment or a happening that has a limited history and a limited future” (14). Spivak offers a unique understanding of nationalism by placing it in the public sphere. She writes, “In whatever nationalist colours they are dressed, whether chronological or logical, the impulse to nationalism is ‘we must control the workings of our own public sphere’.” In the colonial context, the public sphere was systematically controlled using a set of strategies that fostered a sense of nationalism.

According to Benedict Anderson, the colonial state imagined its dominion through the production of representations such as the census, the map, and the museum, and in many cases post-colonial states have carried on that legacy. In the case of South East Asia, Anderson notes that the census was used to systematically quantify instead of

classifying individuals. Arjun Appadurai, in “Number in the Colonial Imagination,” writes about India’s colonial experience with the census. The All-India Census of 1872 became instrumental for the colonial power in expanding their bureaucratic control and knowledge, while also helping to ignite communitarian and nationalist identities (114-133). The census created ideas of majority and minority as culturally coded terms for dominant and disenfranchised groups. Democracy in India became synonymous with a politics of representation, dictated by the politics of statistics. In the colonial imaginary, the maps and the census intersected. In South East Asia, the maps formalized the divide between various groups territorially. As Anderson writes, “by a sort of demographic triangulation, the census filled in politically the formal topography of the map” (174). In the case of South Asia, the census was coupled with a mapping of the agricultural lands and religious identities. The 1947 partition of India demonstrates the creation of borders on the map along the religious lines. Anderson also notes that post-independence states show remarkable continuities with their colonial predecessors. The mapping that took place in East Pakistan, in terms of division of resources, labour and land, in the years leading up to the most recent drawing of boundaries in the region demonstrates that point well. The articulation of the museum as a site of power and politics was also evident in the imaginary, and, according to Anderson, postcolonial states have inherited the “colonial political museumizing.” Anderson writes that monumental archaeology allowed the colonial state to appear to be the guardian of local tradition and ancient prestige. More discussion on museums and the powers inscribed in them will follow in the subsequent section, but here it suffices to note that the process of nation-building in colonized states has a limited history and it created nations in superficial and often violent ways.

Nationalism, as social anthropologist Ernest Gellner argues in his work, invented nations where they did not exist before (49). In many parts of South Asia, nationalism developed as a direct consequence of British colonization. For instance, in India prior to the British colonization there existed many princely states that engaged in battles over territories but there was no attempt at unification under the banner of nationalism. The British implemented a policy of “divide and rule” in their colonies and nationalist movements gained momentum as a way to organize against the colonizers by bringing people together, and in that struggle the question of gender had to take a backseat. In *Diasporic Mediations*, tracing back the history of nationalism in South Asia, postcolonial theorist R. Radhakrishnan distinguishes between two kinds of nationalism: Eastern and Western. According to Radhakrishnan, Western nationalism creates an “us vs. them” divide and as a result generates its own model of autonomy from within. The distinct features of each nation that bind them to nativity become the basis of a modernity that re-roots and reconfirms a native sense of identity. Eastern nationalism, in particular “Third world” nationalism, as Radhakrishnan argues, is forced to assimilate something alien to their own culture to become modern nations (194). This forced assimilation to the model of universality and modernity, in spite of people's various histories, results in violence and oppression towards ethnic minorities, which is what the world witnessed in 1947 in South Asia. The Hindu and Muslim communities that fell victim to the nationalist politics in the years leading up to the partition of 1947 had coexisted for hundreds of years in the subcontinent, and we see an analysis of that not only in Radhakrishnan's writing but also in Spivak's *Nationalism and the Imagination*. The modern concept of nationalism in South Asia tried to foster imagined communities, as Radhakrishnan notes, by betraying

its own inner realities and suppressing “the politics of subalternity” (196), which as a result pushed the question of gender equality to the back burner. Radhakrishnan’s investigation of nationalism in the Indian sub-continent shows that western nationalism in India created a problematic relationship between women and the state, as this imaginary homeland and the struggle against colonizers both resembled a traditional family with well-defined and hierarchical roles in accordance with the terms of patriarchy, pushing women farther away from power and control. In *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, Anne McClintock declares that all nationalisms are gendered, all are invented and all are dangerous (352). The ideology of nationalism, which in its most extreme forms manifests itself in genocide, is grounded in gendered power and social relations.

Gender and Nationalism

In “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” Joan W. Scott argues that gender is firmly rooted in cultural symbols, interpretation of cultural symbols, kinship, and subjective identity (1067). Scott emphasizes the need to examine gender as a way to decode and understand the complex social relationships that construct gender in the first place and lead to its present day expression in social organizations and cultural representations. In *Technologies of Gender* (1987) Teresa de Lauretis focuses on gender as a representation (4). Gender represents not an individual but a social relation between one entity and others, which pre-exists the individual. Taking on Althusser’s articulation of ideology’s main function as constituting individuals as subjects, de Lauretis writes:

If I substitute gender for ideology, the statement still works, but with a slight shift of the terms: Gender has the function (which

defines it) of constituting concrete individuals as men and women. That shift is precisely where the relation of gender to ideology can be seen, and seen to be an effect of the ideology of gender. The shift from 'subjects' to 'men and women' marks the conceptual distance between two orders of discourse, the discourse of philosophy or political theory and the discourse of "reality." Gender is granted (and taken for granted) in the latter but excluded from the former. (6)

Here, de Lauretis is in direct conversation with the important texts that exist on ideology, sexuality and femininity, and pointing out the absence of the female subject from the discourses. This absence of the female subject is an essential component of gender as a representation. Gender marks a woman from man not only through a difference in sex, but mainly through the culturally conceived and assigned roles given to different individuals in a society. As de Lauretis points out in her work, the challenge and potential of a feminist discourse on gender is to understand how the female subject is at the same time inside and outside the ideology of gender. Gender is constructed through its representation and self-representation, and reinforced through pedagogy, cultural norms, political realities and economics. Self-representation of gender takes place when women learn to identify themselves as women and therefore enter the sex-gender system in their various political and social realities. If gender is to be examined as more than merely sexual difference, and as a social relation, then the category "women" no longer appears as a unified entity since social relations differ regionally. In fact, there are many differences within the category "women". An articulation of "women" as a unified socio-cultural category presumes not only unity of its subjects but also the universality of the shared characteristics and experiences that form a woman. Such categorization creates problems for the specificity of experience and history, as they may vary across different locations and cultures. While universality of rights and freedoms has been enshrined in

the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, gender-specific oppression remains subject to location and history. The rhetoric of “Women’s rights are human rights” mobilizes not only the idea of similar goals but more importantly the idea of universal suffering, universal progress and universal sisterhood. But women’s rights have progressed differently in different parts of the world due to their varying encounters with patriarchy, nationalism and colonialism.

Within feminist scholarship, researchers such as Chandra T. Mohanty, Gayatri Spivak, Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan oppose a universalized reading of gender and emphasize the politics of location and an understanding of subjectivities as products of local instances of history and struggle with patriarchy. Highlighting the necessity of situating women’s experiences at the intersection of race, class and political reality, Kimberlé Crenshaw writes, “because of their intersectional identity as both women *and* of colour within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, women of colour are marginalized within both” (1224). Crenshaw maps out intersectionality as structural, political and representational. Structural intersectionality, according to Crenshaw, helps us understand the ways in which the location of women of colour at the intersection of race and gender form their experience of domestic violence and rape; political intersectionality addresses the paradoxical marginalization of the issue of violence against women in the anti-racist and feminist organizing; and representational intersectionality addresses the intersection of racial and gender stereotypes. As Crenshaw argues, to meet the needs of women of colour it is crucial to understand their priorities and work towards solutions. The concept of intersectionality has been criticised for its lack of acknowledgement and theorizing of the category “nation”. Gender and Queer

Studies scholar, Jasbir Puar points out, “the categories privileged by intersectional analysis do not necessarily traverse national and regional boundaries nor genealogical exigencies, presuming and producing static epistemological renderings of categories themselves across historical and geopolitical locations” (376). In Puar’s critique of intersectionality, the United States is reproduced as the dominant site of feminist inquiry through the use of intersectionality as a conceptual framework to teach difference, instead of contextualizing it within a particular historical and activist context. Puar’s position is aligned with the approach taken by postcolonial and Third World feminist scholars who emphasize the necessity and specificity of national and historical locations in studying gender. Gendered identities in South Asia must be studied as the interplay of community, class, and religion with wider political, economic and social forces that are inevitably a product of colonization. In *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, Kumari Jayawardena connects feminism to nationalist movements in post-colonial nation-states in Asia. Jayawardena writes that in many colonized countries, feminist movements were a product of nationalist forces. European domination, according to Jayawardena, brought education and improved rights for women, but a feminist agenda was considered secondary and their implementation had to wait until after the success of the nationalist struggle (255-258). Jayawardena notes, “the struggles in colonized states were devoted to the establishment of modern nation states based on the European model – secular, democratic, capitalist states” (257). The nationalist ideologies in South Asia brought women into the open. But their engagement with the nationalist movements has resulted in an identity that is deeply rooted in culture, religion and nation.

Gendered Violence of Nationalism and Genocide

Women have a curious place in nationalism as women are subjected to violence both in the nationalist discourses and in the struggle to acquire nationhood. The hierarchy and asymmetrical power balance of gender is mirrored in all collectivities, including the nation. Woman, often referred to as the mother of the nation, is pigeonholed into the traditional role of a caregiver akin to the space she is to occupy within a traditional patriarchal family. In her role as a mother, she is prevented from having equal participation in society as a worker and as a citizen. Socialized as a subordinate to man within a traditional familial structure, a woman in "nation" finds expression in domestic space. While men are the protectors of the boundaries of a nation-state, women are to reproduce it and nurture it. Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis in their analysis of nationalist ideology and women find five ways in which women are implicated in nationalism:

- a) as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities;
- b) as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups;
- c) as participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture;
- d) as signifiers of ethnic/national differences - as a focus and symbol in ideological discourses used in the construction, reproduction and transformation of ethnic/national categories;
- e) as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles. (7)

A woman's most important role within nationalism is tied to reproduction. The usage of the word reproduction here by Yuval-Davis and Anthias is in the context of human and social reproduction, specifically in national, ethnical and racial categories (8). The role of "reproducers" is in line with the metaphor of "mother" which is often mobilized in a discourse about nationalism. And, because of this particular role ascribed to women

within nationalism, we see that from the Holocaust to the rape camps of Bangladesh, the former Yugoslavia, and Rwanda historically, women have been targeted differently from their male counterparts in a conflict situation, specifically in genocide.

Genocide, as defined in Article II of the Genocide Convention, is an act committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group. The acts include: killing or causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and forcibly transferring children of the group to another group (Chinkin 333). The practice of genocide is rooted in nationalism and cultural superiority, underscored by the ideas of nationality, race, religion, and ethnicity. An appeal for this ideology is manufactured based on the differential distribution of power and wealth, as the dominant culture seeks to homogenize the minority culture to make up the nation state. This dominant culture is patriarchal in all its institutions, distributions of power, labour and resources, gendering not only the idea of nationalism but also the violence that results during genocide.

The term *genocide*, as Elisa von Joeden-Forgey argues, is also gendered in its origins. According to von Joeden-Forgey, the Convention on Genocide was drafted in a political environment concerned with the "public sphere," which was defined in gendered terms, in opposition to the "private sphere" (78). This is evident in the way the UN Convention on Genocide defines genocide as devoid of any female-specific experience, such as rape, forced pregnancies, and mutilation of women's reproduction organs. The gender-neutrality of crimes of genocide has been brought to question by specific cases,

most notable among them has been the Akayesu case. In 1998, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda convicted Jean-Paul Akayesu of committing crimes of genocide and rape in Rwanda in 1994, making it the first time rape was ever tried as a component of genocide. However, the definition of genocide is yet to be changed. As von Joeden-Forgey writes, genocide seeks to destroy the generative power of a group and the institutions that support it, namely the family (78). Since the family is the basic unit of reproduction of groups, the perpetrators target families for en masse killing. In most cases, the survivors of genocide tell the tale of losing their entire family to violence. This has a two-fold effect. One, the loss of life, and two, the impediment in the coping process due to the absence of the loved ones who would help bring back normalcy to life, and the additional guilt of survival. The disruption of life and livelihood as a result of war leads to a loss of social and economic status for many women. Additionally, history tells us that during genocide women are also targeted for gender-specific violence such as rape and forced pregnancy.

In the early stages of my research in 2011, I had the privilege of spending time at the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre. As I introduced my research at the Holocaust survivors' weekly meeting, the resistance to the exploration of gender during the Holocaust was palpable. To my question regarding if and how women experienced the Holocaust differently than their male counterparts, a female survivor responded that gendered crimes of war take place in countries like Afghanistan and not in Europe. Furthermore, she told me that during the Holocaust men and women suffered the same due to their Jewish identity. Even though in the 1980s feminist scholars started their examination of the Holocaust from women's perspective, asking what happened to

women during the Holocaust is still a question marred by controversy. Myrna Goldenberg writes that violence and sexuality appear as a common theme in memoirs of female Holocaust survivors. There were cases of sexual favours being exchanged in return for food and a chance of survival (Goldenberg 84), and in addition to forced prostitution and abortion. Moreover, Goldenberg writes that in Einsatzgruppen actions, some girls and young women were raped before being murdered, despite the 1935 Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour prohibiting intercourse between Aryans and Jews (Goldenberg 83). Goldenberg writes of Judith Isaacson, who was 16 at the time of the Holocaust and feared rape. Years later when Isaacson returned to Hungary with her daughter, her daughter asked her about the fate of her mother's friends. Isaacson explained that most of them had been raped and killed, by Russians if not by Nazis. "When her daughter sighed that 'thousands of women were raped during the war, but no one hears about them,' Isaacson answered, 'The Anne Franks who survived rape don't write their stories'" (Goldenberg 83).

In the 1971 genocide in Bangladesh, it is estimated that over 200,000 Bengali women were raped by the Pakistani army. After the war the new government faced the issue of dealing with the shame that was supposedly brought to the nation by rape survivors. As Yasmin Saikia writes in "Overcoming the Silent Archive in Bangladesh," it was partly in the context of reintegration of these women into society that the government designated rape survivors of the war as "Birangana" meaning female hero (73). But it was also because of the national shame and humiliation at the hands of the enemy that the Bengali government declared rape survivors as "Biranganas". By classifying rape as a sacrifice, the government attempted to appropriate women's pain and suffering for their

own propaganda of the nationalist cause. The government made rape and violence against women of secondary importance within the discourse of Bengali nationalism and in the war fought by men on behalf of the nation to obtain nationhood. The few women who decided to seek justice were shunned by their families and communities. Any evidence of mass rape in 1971, including police reports, medical reports, letters and photographs, was destroyed by the government as part of the active national campaign of forgetting (Saikia, “Overcoming the Silent Archive in Bangladesh” 75). Moreover, the years that followed the war of independence saw a transformation of “Biranganas” into “Baranganas” meaning prostitutes in the local memory (Saikia, “Overcoming the Silent Archive in Bangladesh” 73). As a result of the labeling of the rape survivors as prostitutes, Saikia’s research shows, the women were silenced and their stories were written off as collateral damage of the war, as opposed to examining these rapes as a strategic and carefully implemented policy by the enemy. Yasmin Saikia’s research – “Overcoming the Silent Archive in Bangladesh” (2007) and *Women, War and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971* (2011) – is an attempt to close the gap between the official histories and women’s trauma. Saikia’s project is grounded on the silenced and hidden memories of gendered violence suffered and perpetrated at multiple sites. However, in the context of Bangladesh it is not a simple remembering or disremembering. Among the survivors, Saikia notes a simultaneous need to remember and a desire to forget (*Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh* 5). One survivor told Saikia,

Don't ask me who killed whom, who raped whom, what was the religion, ethnic or linguistic background of the people who died in the war. The victims in the war were the women of this country - mothers who lost children, sisters who lost their brothers, wives who lost their husbands, women who lost everything - their honor and dignity. In the war men victimized

women. It was a year of anarchy and the end of humanity. Is this something to talk about? (Overcoming the Silent Archive in Bangladesh 71)

This is something to talk about and challenge through an investigation into the patriarchal and dominant narrative on genocide that performs the function of silencing of women's stories in the name of the collective and the nation.

In the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, over 800,000 people were killed, a quarter of a million women were raped, and 67% of the rape victims were infected with HIV (Rwanda: Marked for Death, 3). In that genocide, the ideology of gender was mobilized in a complex way and turned women's bodies into not only sites of violence but also weapons of war. A 1990 newspaper article published by *Kangura* stated, "Every Hutu must know that the Tutsi woman, wherever she may be, is working for the Tutsi ethnic cause," and "Every Hutu must know that our Hutu daughters are more worthy and more conscientious as women, as wives and as mothers. Aren't they lovely, excellent secretaries, and more honest!" (Sai, Women Under Siege). News and propaganda articles such as these were rampant before the genocide, and portrayed Tutsi women as sex weapons to be used by the Tutsi men to destroy the Hutu population. In *Gender and Genocide in Rwanda* (1999), Lisa Sharlach writes that any Tutsi woman who survived was likely to have been raped (p. 393). The survivors report that attackers made references to their ethnicity before or during rape: "You Tutsi women are too proud," and "You Tutsi women think you are too good for us" (Sharlach, 1999, p. 394). After the genocide, there were 10 times more widows than widowers and entire communities were left without men.

During the genocide in the former Yugoslavia, rape was used by the Serb forces

from 1991-1995 to humiliate the Bosnian community and terrorize them into leaving. In the Balkans, as media studies scholar Krista Lynes argues in *Prismatic Media* the figure of the woman was not only gendered but also became an ethnic sign. Racial ethnicity became synonymous with religious differences and ethnic identity synonymous with national boundaries (53). During the conflict, the representation of women in the articulation of Serbian nationalism was deeply rooted in long held resentments towards the “other”. The survivors' accounts show that Bosnian women were called "Turkish whores" in Serbian nationalist discourse and as a result by the Serb militiamen (Lynes 51). The origins of this hate lay partly in the fourteenth century Turkish victory which resulted in the occupation of Serbia by the Ottoman Empire. Lynes notes, "The prescription for righting those wrongs lay also in a vengeance against sites of perceived threat to Serbian nationalism, sites where gender and ethnicity were impossible to separate" (50). It was in the vein of vengeance that in the former Yugoslavia, the rape and forced pregnancy of Bosnian women took place as a war strategy to violate women's bodies, which had already been transformed into the site of nationalist struggle. Because of the shame associated with speaking about experiences of sexual assault, not every rape incident was reported, however, it is estimated that between 30,000 and 50,000 women were raped in that conflict (Enloe 140). Cynthia Enloe quotes from Tadeusz Mazowiecki's report, one case of a Muslim woman living in a Serb-occupied town:

She reported being taken by an ethnic Serb policeman to a private home where she was presented with the words: "Here she is, Commander. I brought her!" She recognized the "Commander" as one of the strongest political figures in the region before the war. He told her to go into his office, which was his bedroom, where he raped her. (141)

In addition to the obvious trauma from the rape and the social taboo associated with it,

forced impregnation was used in the Bosnian genocide as a means to interrupt the Bosnian community's normal access to reproductive heteronormativity, and thus limiting the growth of their community. Many women raped during genocide found themselves pregnant with the child of their rapist in the aftermath of genocide and were forced to give birth. Siobhán K. Fisher writes about the ways forced impregnation is used to interfere in the group's reproduction in genocide:

First, women may be psychologically traumatized by the pregnancy and unable to have normal sexual or childbearing experiences with members of their own group. Second, women who are raped and bear the children of the aggressors may no longer be marriageable in their society. Third, the women, simply because they are pregnant with the children of the aggressors, cannot bear their own children during this time - their wombs are 'occupied.' (93)

In Bangladesh, many women who were raped by the enemy soldiers found themselves pregnant with their rapist's child. To rid the nation of the "Bastard Pakistani" the option of abortion was made available by the government and those who could not or did not get an abortion were abandoned by their families and ostracized by the society. The social and psychological trauma of wartime rape is not limited to the raped women but it continues for the children conceived as a result of wartime rape. After the war of 1971, some war babies were exported to western countries like Canada with the help of Roman Catholic nun Mother Teresa where they were given up for adoption. Even though the internationally adopted war babies fared considerably better than those who remained in Bangladesh, my interviews with war babies adopted by Canadian families show that their trauma continues today as over forty years after the war they still struggle to come to terms with their violent birth.

The above cases offer just a glimpse into the presence of gendered atrocities during genocide. With genocide defined along the lines of ethnic divide and reproduction, it becomes impossible to focus more or less on ethnicity or gender, as both ethnic and gendered identities are markers of asymmetrical social relations and power hierarchies. Ethnic identity is a product of the marking of difference, and gender of sexual difference. While ethnic identity marks the other within the collective of a nation, it also implies a limitation on shared understandings, values and belonging. The oppression of women finds room for expression in an ethnic conflict when the dominant culture seeks to define what it means to be a woman, and tries to ascertain the truth about women of a particular ethnicity by tying them down to reproduction and growth of a minority group. Limiting the definition of genocide to ethnic differences makes it gender-neutral and forces an erasure of women's distinct experiences that often continue after genocide, in the form of forced pregnancies, loss and other trauma. There is a need for feminist scholars of genocide to examine gender-based violence against women at the intersection of patriarchy and nationalism, both intrinsically gendered and violent. Lynes notes that the complex relationship between gender, nationalism and genocide divided the feminist community in Zagreb and in the West on the issue of whether to put more emphasis on the gendered dimension or the ethnic dimension of genocide.

Emphasis on the former might attend to the prevalence of rape as a wartime phenomenon, and create a basis for cross-ethnic solidarity among women, but it could not account for the mobilization of rape and forced pregnancy as part of an 'ethnic cleansing' campaign. Emphasis on the latter might take as a given the very collapse of 'woman' and 'nation' responsible for gender-based violence in times of armed conflict. This latter approach further made strange bedfellows of the media campaigns of nationalist governments, who sought to use the incidence of rape to make clear the wrongs committed against

their civic body, and local and international feminist groups, who sought to make visible the genocidal dimension of the mass rapes. (48)

Lynes aptly warns us that while focusing on gender may bring to light the prevalence of sexual violence against women globally, it also jeopardizes a particular reading of gender and ethnicity which was seen in the former Yugoslavia (49). A feminist reading of genocide demands a marriage of the two very different approaches – a way of looking at genocide that allows differences in history and experiences while also making room for sameness. Including gender in representations of genocide will ensure that differences in the experiences of men and women and between different groups of women are better investigated and understood. Representational intersectionality demands that the differences within groups are acknowledged and accounted for in the way images of marginalized women are created and circulated. Difference can, in fact, provide a space for understanding the implication of ethnicity and gender in defining women's various experiences in genocide, instead of a universalized representation, commonly seen in the media. To make room for difference, in the context of representation of gendered violence of the 1971 genocide in Bangladesh, means accounting for the experiences of women who were targeted for violence based on their ethnicity, religion, social class or all three.

The narrative often constructed by the nationalist forces simultaneously shuns the gendered crimes of war as a source of national shame and as evidence of the atrocities committed by the enemy, which is especially the case when the war crime cases are brought to justice. National institutions such as war museums play a significant role in

ensuring that the crimes that were committed against their nation and for which justice is being sought, continue to figure in the national memory.

History is the Perpetrator

The violence endured by women in the name of nationalism is repeated again in the writing of national history. The secondary position that women occupy within nationalism is mirrored in the nationalist narratives of history. Scholars of Subaltern Studies, including Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Ranajit Guha, have problematized the historiography of the Indian subcontinent. Subaltern Studies raises important questions about the dominant discourses of history, in particular India's colonial past and the difficulties of the nation-state in articulating the role of women in history. Partha Chatterjee argues in "Nation and Its Women" that Indian nationalism situated the questions regarding women's position in society in an "inner" domain of sovereignty far removed from the arena of political contest with the colonial state (242). While freedom was articulated in nationalist terms, as Dipesh Chakrabarty argues in "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History," the differences between men and women were largely ignored and the speaking postcolonial subject remained patriarchal. The gendered narratives of history in colonial India continue to depict womanhood as a disability to be overcome for national independence and sovereignty. Durba Ghosh attempts to incorporate stories of female "revolutionary terrorists" whose feminine nature was transformed by the conditions of colonial rule, which was seen as an assault on the nation's manhood (356). The dominant accounts of the history of the region, however, remain patriarchal narratives that are constructed around anti-colonial nationalist

struggle. History-writing re-establishes hegemonic ideologies and narratives. This is a primary concern of postcolonial scholarship, also echoed in Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Challenging the imperialist subject-production, Spivak asks, how is history written in South Asia? Spivak writes:

Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced. The question is not of female participation in insurgency, or the ground rules of the sexual division of labor, for both of which there is 'evidence'. It is, rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow. (pp82-83)

Through her discussion of *suttee*, the self-immolation of widows, Spivak constructs a counternarrative of woman's consciousness in South Asia. The practice of *suttee* was banned by the British colonizers in 1829, thus becoming an example of what Spivak calls, "white men saving brown women from brown men." Against this, Spivak writes, is the Indian nativist argument: "The women actually wanted to die" (93). The two statements legitimize one another but women's testimony, which would produce a counter-narrative, has been silenced. Narratives of history that have been produced from a position of power and dominance perform epistemic violence to the colonial subject and in the Indian context have muted the subaltern woman as a subject. History continues to be a contested territory. As feminist historian Yasmin Saikia writes, we cannot afford this kind of history any longer. Saikia quotes Mahmood Mamdani, "The perpetrator is history" (Women, War and the Making of Bangladesh 9). This perpetrator has created enemies and bodies over which wars are fought in the various discourses that seek omission and forgetting of the complex lived realities of people, especially women. As

Spivak argues in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” “Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third world woman’ caught between tradition and modernization” (102). The disappearance of the subaltern woman from the narratives of history is evident in the archives of the Liberation War Museum of Bangladesh. To interrogate history, one must closely examine the site where history is memorialized, and war museums and their archives are one such site. Through sanctioned erasures and memorialization, the archive of a museum transforms into a repository of public memory, sanctioned by those with authority and power to create history, as I will explore in the next chapter.

Chapter 4
Archives, Museums
and the Politics of Representation

Archives are commonly understood as spaces for the preservation of documents, but they are more than a simple repository of public records, photographs and other such items. As Jacques Derrida argues in *Archive Fever – A Freudian Impression*, the word ‘archive’ originating from the Greek *arkheion* (a house of public records) is a site of consignment, where those with authority are able to unify, identify, and classify various elements into a single meaningful corpus. These are individuals with political power and publicly recognized authority. Derrida writes, “On account of their publicly recognized authority, it is at their home, in that *place* which is their house (private house, family house, or employee's house), that official documents are filed. The archons are first of all the documents' guardians” (10). Those in charge exercise a great deal of power in collecting traces of the past and authenticating them, assigning meaning to them and banishing the uncomfortable memories to oblivion. The material in the archive is thus carefully selected for preservation. National archives tend to feed nationalism by creating a national memory of a historic event and thus become historical and political sites of enunciation. They create a repository of public memory and function to remind people of the common suffering encountered by the collectivity.

National war museums are sites of consignment and remembering. In the colonial imaginary, as Benedict Anderson writes, the museum is a source of imperial power that seeks to manipulate the empire by appearing as the guardian of local heritage. Through

their displays of archival images, the war museums offer an opportunity to study the seizing and framing of memories. Because of the unique position women occupy within nation and nationalism, from the Holocaust to Bangladesh, gendered accounts of war often become an easy target for selective remembering. The Yad Vashem museum in Israel, the Kigali Memorial Centre in Rwanda, and the Liberation War Museum of Bangladesh are representational sites of genocide. In distinct ways, the archives at these war museums seek to document, commemorate and educate the public about the atrocities committed against Jews, Tutsis, and Bengalis respectively. The content at these museums reflects established values, political undertakings, collective aspirations and collective remembering. The display at the Liberation War Museum of Bangladesh represents the war of 1971 and tells the story from a male perspective. The representations of women's experiences at the War Museum bring to attention the patriarchal framework within which the photographs are displayed and viewed. The meanings and values are constructed in a patriarchal framework by the image-maker and a similar patriarchal framework is called upon by the viewer to appropriate the meaning of the image. The displayed photographs of violence done to a woman's body bring attention to the fetishization and voyeurism that women are subjected to in nationalist discourses and everyday life. The repetition of such images interwoven with the account of national trauma creates a discourse that is devoid of complexities of gender and seeks erasure of any other kind of experiences women might have gone through as a result of the war. The images in the archives of a war museum tell a story of a nation's unease with women's place in nationalist discourse.

As described earlier, there are over 17,500 artefacts at the War Museum. The images on display at the Liberation War Museum of Bangladesh offer an opening into the dominant constructs of gender and womanhood in that society. The general tone of the exhibit at the museum, while celebratory towards the nation's victory and survival, portrays a grim picture of women's experiences in war. The photographs of women on display at the War Museum offer insights into the national memory of the war in which women were either raped and killed, took up arms to fight for the nation, or became refugees. History at the war museum has been separated into chapters ranging from the period of British colonization to the various conflicts and movements under the Pakistani rule and to the war itself.

The displays are divided into six galleries. Gallery 1 displays some archaeological materials from as far back as 500 BC, history and culture of Bengal, the experience under the colonial rule and communal tensions before the 1947 partition. Gallery 2 is a testament to the national pride in Bengali identity in the years between 1947-1971. This is also the place where the various protest movements against the government, including the Language Movement and Students' Movement, are remembered and personal items of the nation's founding father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman are displayed. Gallery 3 depicts the events leading up to the war and the declaration of independence by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The mass migration of Bengalis to India as a result of the war is depicted through newspaper clippings and photographs. Gallery 4 presents the war of 1971 in the images of freedom fighters, war heroes and victims and their personal belongings. Gallery 5 features international relief efforts, the role played by the international media, the role of women in the war and the arms used by the freedom fighters. It also shows the

collaboration of religious fundamentalists and Biharis inside the country with the Pakistani Army in the war. Gallery 6 shows the killing of the intellectuals, excavated human remains from two killing fields in Dhaka, the role of the Indian Army and the nation's victory on 16 December 1971.

Through photographs, newspaper clippings, historical documents, private communications and other personal items, it is obvious that the Liberation War Museum presents the national loss endured by the Bengali nation in the war of 1971. While the national loss is articulated clearly in the museum displays, the story of women's experiences in the war becomes a story of absence. In "Trauma, Absence, Loss," Dominick LaCapra succinctly captures the distinction between absence and loss with "paradise absent is different from paradise lost" (706). The story of the nation's loss is narrativized at the war museum through evidence of atrocities and destruction committed by the national enemy. But the complexity of the violence experienced by women who actively participated in the war, women who were raped and/or internally displaced, or women who belonged to religious minority groups is largely absent. But as LaCapra argues, one cannot lose what one never had. The intersectionality at which gender is constructed in Bangladesh – class, religion, and ethnicity – gives rise to various expressions of gender and creates subjectivities that are suppressed in the name of the nation. In the national struggle against the common enemy, the only viable and readily accessible identity afforded to a woman is that of being Bengali. If the multiplicity is not acknowledged in the nation's pre-war rhetoric, it will also remain absent in the nationalist discourses that ensue after the war. The absence has been fetishized at the museum through simplification, appropriation and erasure of certain experiences to the extent that

the actual violence endured by women has become mystified, fictionalized and the ongoing nature of it is downplayed. The Liberation War Museum of Bangladesh, in LaCapra's terms, is a place where absence and loss have been conflated in the name of nationalism. It is this conflation that facilitates the appropriation of women's trauma by the caretakers of the museum who are closely linked with the nationalist discourses, in the form of their involvement in Bangladeshi academic circles, national identity-building projects and the ongoing war trials.

Naristhan/Ladyland engages with the archives of the war museum to re-create Bangladesh's official narrative on the war of 1971 and juxtaposes the national memory with women's memories of the war to highlight the difference in remembering. The objects on display, including the burning flame, bones and skulls, the moving and still images of the war, have tremendous visual powers. They have been selected by the museum for preservation for their ability to represent history and as such symbolize the nation's relationship to that history. In this research project, the photographs from the war museum help to frame that history. The encounter with the archives starts at the entrance of the war museum, which has an eternal flame burning in a glass display case to remember the war and those who were killed. From there, the entrance to the galleries allows us a view of how history has been separated into chapters ranging from the period of British colonization to the various conflicts and movements under the Pakistani rule and to the war itself. The exploration of the archives continues with Rokeya Sakhawat's story *Sultana's Dream* on display at the war museum. The idea of overcoming gender as seen in Sakhawat's 'Ladyland' is similar to the way the contributions of women are framed in the national narrative on display on the walls of the War Museum.

The museum display exaggerates the contributions from Muslim Bengali politicians and diminishes the efforts by Hindu Bengali leaders. The Hindu minorities of East Pakistan who felt threatened by the Urdu-speaking Muslim rulers of the country made significant contributions to the Language Movement in an attempt to hold on to their identity and the war museum's display of the movement is one of the places where the omission in national memory is felt strongly. Dhirendranath Dutta was one of the founding members of the movement, but his name is mentioned only once and the group photograph of Mr. Dutta with other politicians has no names to identify him. The images from Gallery II of the war museum have been used in this project to highlight the national forgetting of the Hindu Minorities. The violence endured by the Hindu minorities in the war of 1971 is heightened in the elisions in the national memory. The violence in the writing of history is symptomatic of the place Hindu minorities were to occupy in the national memory of the war of 1971 and in the way the society was formed after the war. To this day, Hindus are seen as the 'other' of the Bengali nation and targeted in communal riots, rape and looting.

Images of refugees from the war museum mobilize the idea of a total omission of the internally displaced, Urdu-speaking refugees from the national accounts of history. The images on display show Bengalis who crossed the border into India to seek refuge during the war and depict the deplorable living conditions inside those refugee camps. But there is no mention of the refugees who continue to be subjugated to similar inhumane living conditions inside Bangladesh today. During the war of 1971, while a small proportion of the Urdu-speaking population in Bangladesh did in fact collaborate with the Pakistani army in committing atrocities, a vast majority became victims of

displacement and some were also targeted by Bengali freedom fighters for looting, killing and rape. Inside the refugee camps, many of the internally displaced women are afraid to talk about their losses, some show signs of post-traumatic stress and virtually all live in a dire state of poverty. Until 2008, the residents of the refugee camps were not considered citizens of Bangladesh and their movement was restricted. They were unable to reside outside of the camp or receive education and secure employment to improve their conditions. The violence that Urdu-speaking women face today is in part due to their ethnic affiliations and but also because of their low socio-economic status.

Rape is on display at the museum, but in a manner that seems to fetishize the violence done to a woman's body. The most iconic images of wartime rape depict women who were also killed. A representation of a rape *survivor* is absent from the iconography of genocide. Furthermore, the seizing and freezing of frames that show naked and tortured bodies of women depict the injustice done to women, while insisting on their belonging to the past. There is little to no representation of the continuation of women's trauma in their daily lives after the war ended. The caricatures that were discovered on the walls of the sex camps established by the Pakistani army now make their presence felt on the walls of the war museum. This framing of sexual violence tells us the attitude of the army during the war and the degraded place women were to occupy in the discourses of gendered violence in the war of 1971. The images from the war museum are employed in this project to explore the nation's fraught relationship to women and the way their bodies become sites of violence during and after war. The play *Jamuna* presented at the Liberation War Museum is also viewed as an archival text that insists on transcending the past and being performed and given meaning in the present.

Lastly, the images of freedom fighters from the war of 1971 on display at the museum point out a basic contradiction in the national memory. The museum displays numerous images of women protesting and carrying guns, but most of the individuals recognized and honoured by the government for their war efforts were male soldiers. In fact, only two female freedom fighters were officially acknowledged and rewarded by the government and at the museum their contributions are showcased in passport-size photographs with a few lines that summarize the role they played in the war. Rather than a general silencing of women's experiences in the war of 1971, the exhibit at the war museum in Bangladesh therefore appropriates their stories to construct a gendered narrative of the war where women gave sacrifice in the struggle for nationhood. The complexity of experiences of female freedom fighters who wished to fight in the war but were largely seen in a domestic role and as care providers instead of combatants is downplayed at the museum. Also reduced in significance is the forgetting of female freedom fighters that took place in the national commemoration and celebration of war heroes after the war which celebrated the male freedom fighters while women were largely ignored. Since *genocide* is defined under the UN convention as a crime against a group of people, a crime that targets individuals for their membership in that group, the differentiation of gender has been absent from these iconic images.

The issue of gendered violence in the name of the nation is central to any discussion on historical discourses of genocide. The gendered experiences of genocide and their representations in national memory are located at the intersection of community, class, and religion. The current narratives of history, instead of representing women's experiences at the intersection of these complex forces, marginalize women

through omissions, appropriations and silencing. My research project seeks to intervene in the historical accounts of the war of 1971 by problematizing gendered identities and gendered experiences in war instead of fixing them as a singularity. In doing so, this research offers a gendered reading of genocide, which comprises multiple subjectivities with the only unifying force being the economic, sexual and other violence done to women in the name of nationalism. At the core of my research are representations of genocide in history. Images of genocide, both still and moving, record reality and provide evidence. But the evidence provided by war photographs is more than a simple seized frame of reality. The reality of war captured in photographs is as much about what the photograph discloses as it is about what is hidden, what is included in the frame and what is excluded, and the ideologies that render an event worth photographing. Crimes of genocide seek to erase plurality and differences that exist within the folds of the nation. By documenting trauma, some photographers and filmmakers have in the past used a number of representational strategies to challenge the erasure of differences, which is the end goal of genocide.

Visual Culture and Representation

In visual culture, the relationship between image, image-producer and image-consumer is a close one and goes to the heart of the politics of representation. The concept of the politics of representation, as developed by cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall, insists on a critical interrogation of media representations as they inform us about the power hierarchy and discourses in society. The politics of representation make visible the relationship between those with power and the marginalized 'other'. Power operates

in representation by assigning and fixing the meaning of the image and by using it for its own ideological purposes. In "The Spectacle of the 'Other'," Stuart Hall writes, "Meaning floats. It cannot be finally fixed. However attempting to 'fix' it is the work of a representational practice, which intervenes in the many potential meanings of an image in an attempt to privilege one" (228). The meaning, privileged over all others, is dictated by the social institutions and mass media, which operate within a system structured according to power and the ideology that supports it. In essence it is the dominant culture that "fixes" the meaning. Hall argues that people outside the dominant culture, who are not part of "us", are often exposed to a binary form of representation. These representations are sharply polarized: good/bad; civilized/primitive; or oppressed/"feminist." Through closure in the realm of representations, power performs the function of limiting the multiple subjectivities that would be possible if the meaning was not fixed. A representation of women thus created is devoid of their historical struggle and flattens all the differences that exist within the fold. It is a reflection of the problematic position women are forced to occupy in nationalist discourses.

The politics of representation when it comes to the images of women in war, mirror the dominant ideologies of those in power. Nationalist institutions responsible for creating support for nationalist ideologies, including war, mobilize images of women that show a limited range of women's experiences in war. Especially in the images of genocide, dominant representations of women tend to conform to and reproduce the ideology of gender. In *Technologies of Gender*, Teresa de Lauretis argues, "The construction of gender is both the product and the process of its representation" (5). Gender not only seeks to classify individuals based on sexual difference, allowing them

entry into a group or class, but it is a socio-cultural identity and its representation in a society. The images of women in dominant representations of genocide provide us a starting point for an understanding of gender and its ideological underpinnings in a society. Linda Williams' work on Eadward Muybridge's *The Human Figure in Motion* reveals gender constructions in photography from an early time. In Muybridge's images, Williams notes the problem of sexual difference, of the image to the male image-maker. Williams locates a patriarchal power in his photographs that places the woman's body into a perversely fetishized structure of visual culture. The eroticization and fetishization of a woman's image that is so pervasive in visual culture ensures that the woman is defined entirely with a surplus of aestheticism. This surplus of aestheticism generated by the woman's body is designed to disavow difference and it is particularly evident in the dominant representations of genocide. Numerous images of women on display at the Liberation War Museum of Bangladesh show the atrocities of the war, however the suffering depicted in those images is not only more feminized but also more enhanced. The visual images of women carry superfluous details that are deeply embedded in cultural norms. According to Williams, this surplus "severely limits the meaning of this body to the two contradictory poles of the assertion and denial of sexual difference" (Film Body 532). While the images of young Bengali women raped and killed by the Pakistani army assert a sense of common suffering of Bengali people, they also make a strong point about gender differences. The images of war show a power hierarchy and social inequality, linking the politics of representation with the politics of gender and experience. The narrative created through the images of women reinforces and fixes what it means to be a woman. Images of women that depict violence and mass atrocities

committed during war are widely circulated in the form of media texts that serve nationalist propaganda by stipulating collective suffering.

Images of genocide – from the Holocaust to the 1971 genocide in Bangladesh – have been made available for mass consumption as evidence and as reminders of atrocities committed against a people. Spivak writes that nationalist commemoration projects remind people of a common event and suffering encountered by the collectivity and “history is turned into cultural memory” (20). The cultural memory impregnates images that are widely circulated with symbolic values and comes to represent historic events as facts. In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag writes about war photography and the framing of the images of war and the narrative created by them. Sontag problematizes the idea of collective memory and emphasizes the individual nature of memory. Sontag writes,

All memory is individual, unreproducible—it dies with each person. What is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that *this* is important, and this is the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds. Ideologies create substantiating archives of images, representative images, which encapsulate common ideas of significance and trigger predictable thoughts, feelings. (67-68)

Memorialized and widely circulated images of war are conferred emblematic status through collective instruction and they serve the purpose of crystallizing nationalist sentiments among citizens. These enduring public texts have generally been received as authentic and symbolic expressions of history, hence acquiring the status of icons.

Representations of Genocide

Photographs, because of their depiction of reality, offer evidence and photographs of genocide tell us that something horrible like this happened. Photographs instil value in the thing or event being photographed and it is ideology that determines what constitutes an event and whether it is worth photographing. Susan Sontag notes, “There can be no evidence, photographic or otherwise, of an event until the event itself has been named and characterized” (On Photography 19). Images of genocide name the event of genocide and provide evidence of its occurrence. Political ideologies provide the underpinnings of such images and create a collectivity for whom these images are valuable. These images signify cultural mechanisms and encounters with history, and offer us ‘over here’ an aperture into ‘there.’ Photographs of genocide become icons as cultural artefacts, which instead of embodying the truth act as intermediaries for our movement toward it. These cultural artefacts are indicative of collective aspirations and help to create social bonds and, in the case of genocide, through assigning of significance they create a collective memory of an event. It is important to note that if the genocide is not photographed and a narrative is not created around it, it becomes an un-event in popular memory and there are no traces or public memorialization of it. The photographs of genocide become meaningful as they create a public memory of the event.

Unlike other photographs, the images of genocide offer us an opening for analysis of a particular rendering of a historic event. In *Secular Icons*, Cornelia Brink examines closely the iconography of the Holocaust by looking at the authenticity, symbolization, canonization, showing and veiling, and reception of images of genocide which have had their status raised to “iconic”. Brink argues that more than any other photographs, the

images of genocide make a moral claim to be accepted without questioning, but the context in which these images are taken and published call for a reflection on how history is written. The images seek to provide a vivid representation of atrocities committed, and the men and women photographed with their emaciated bodies stand in for all the victims of genocide. The iconic images of genocide have symbolic overtones and when organized and displayed in a nationalist discourse they acquire a nationalist meaning and significance. But as emphasized by Brink, these iconic images must be carefully examined as intermediaries, providing us with an opening into an event from the past and carrying meaning from the past into the present. Their meaning shifts according to the context in which they are shown and looked at (Brink 149). Even though the widely disseminated images of the Holocaust only offer a glimpse of the aftermath of the atrocities committed, the images of mass graves and piles of corpses have become symbolic of the crime and unforgettable in the living memories of the people everywhere. They are widely and repeatedly disseminated in the media and can be found everywhere, including news stories, television, movies, and the Internet, thus turning them into icons. The iconic images of genocide expose political violence, with education and awareness as their main purpose. For those who are geographically removed from the experience of genocide, these pictures also tend to bring them close to the victims of those violent crimes. A large collection of pictures of the Holocaust, including concentration camps, ghettos, prisoners and Nazi soldiers exist in public record. These images taken, transmitted and preserved in the media are raised to a canonical status and are used frequently to create social and political impact. Moreover, in all of the iconic images of genocide that exist in circulation today, there is a forced generalization of violence

against a group of people. Brink writes, "the only pictures of dead concentration camp victims that are classified as icons are those that provide no hint of any specific time and place and 'anonymize' human beings, depriving them of their individuality as much as possible and placing them within aesthetic pictorial traditions" (138). The forced anonymity and sameness of these iconic images seek to erase the specificity of human experience, in particular a woman's experience in genocide. Furthermore, the images of the Holocaust are echoed in the photographs of other genocides. The photographs of piles of dead bodies and skeletons have become a traditional iconic image of a genocide, repeated in the iconography of other genocides including the genocide in Bangladesh, Rwanda and former Yugoslavia, specific in its representation of a crime yet general enough for an untrained eye to confuse one genocide with another. These images tend to map out the death and destruction committed, and offer what Sontag calls "archives of horror." Looking at these icons, one would be forced to forget the gender specificity of the crimes committed during the genocide. These iconic images would have us believe that men and women, products of the history specific to their gender, suffered the same, and more importantly all women experienced the genocide the same way. While depicting crimes of mass atrocities, it is therefore important to critically examine what is absent from these "archives of horror" and what power dynamics are resonated through those omissions.

Challenges to Representation of Gendered Experiences of Genocide

In 1972, Kishor Parekh, an Indian photojournalist, traveled to Bangladesh to document the atrocities and aftermath of the war of 1971 and published his photographs

in a book, titled *Bangladesh: A Brutal Birth*. In Parekh's work, the conflict between unarmed peasants and a modern army is captured through portraits of helplessness and hopelessness and what is highlighted is that in war there are no winners. The most haunting of the images is a captionless photograph of a woman in her veil, looking down and a tear running down her face. S. Mulgaokar wrote the introduction of the book: "We have seen before pictures of a raped woman – but the face of the Bengali woman that Parekh shot for the first section is the face of one who now lives in a world where neither forgiveness nor pain nor memory can ever enter. It is a face at the very edge of suffering – a suffering denied its own understanding" (*Bangladesh: A Brutal Birth*, 1972). Kishor Parekh's photographs bear witness to the genocide of 1971. But more importantly, Parekh's work captures the shattered lives of women of Bangladesh at a particular conjuncture in the history of that nation. The anonymous, defeated and veiled faces of the women captured in his photographs provide more than a footnote to a genocide often forgotten by the world. It shows the cultural identity of a person who is denied her victimhood, whose story is destined to be a part of the forgotten history of a country.

In order to interpret and situate gendered experiences of genocide historically, the dominant representations of gender, constructed from a position of power and inequality, must be challenged and that is where my research project is situated. My research deals directly in the realm of the politics of representation, where the dominant versus the 'other' divide begs the question, what are the experiences that matter and whose? The task of this research project is to investigate the representation of gendered experiences of genocide in the 1971 genocide in Bangladesh and problematize the forced anonymity and universalization of women's experiences in the images of war. As underscored by a

feminist approach, for experience to be shared by women everywhere, it would have to be individual and general, in addition to being ahistorical. But experience is more complex than that. Experience is firmly grounded in class, race, nation and sexuality, informed by history. Furthermore, as Inderpal Grewal argues in her explorations of identity, politics and subject, identities that are created as a result of positioning within a gender, race, or ethnic group are not mutually exclusive and are often constructed across multiple locations, resulting in a feminist subject that is always in the process of becoming (251). Trinh T. Minh-ha maps predominant representations of gender to the feminist movement: “Three stages have occurred in the history of women's liberation: femininity experienced as a handicap - in the name of its inferiority; femininity disabled in the world of virility - in the name of equality; womanhood vaunted like negritude - in the name of difference” (When the Moon Waxes Red 119). These popular representations are an attempt to compartmentalize women into categories that essentially form the category “women” today, as evidenced in the archives of the Liberation War Museum of Bangladesh, where women are depicted as either rape victims or holding guns. Trinh argues that while a label is being forced on a woman, most women are able to recognize in themselves all three stages of women's liberation – we can be docile, frustrated and a skeptic “neither in successive stages, nor as separate entities, but simultaneously, surreptitiously, as traces of ourselves” (When the Moon Waxes Red 120). However, plurality and difference are allowed in discourse if and only if it conforms to the predetermined ideas set by the dominant culture regarding what is acceptable and what is not. This plurality is denied to the women of Bangladesh. The feminist task therefore is to not only make visible the difference in experiences but also the existence of the

repressive mechanisms that create them in the first place. Such visibility and representation can help demystify the otherness of the marginalized “other” and more specifically of women. Recognizing divisions within a unity – at points of differences rooted in history due to race, class and geography – would help to build solidarity and it is that acknowledgement that allows an individual a voice within collectivity. Difference must not be thought about as being on the other end of the spectrum as sameness, and difference should also not be confused with individualism. As Trinh emphasizes in *When the Moon Waxes Red*, there is room for difference within unity. By allowing differences, the transnational feminist approach makes room for historicization and a more honest representation of an individual's experience. In the following section, I closely look at documentary films made in observational and reflexive mode and their political activism in representing the experiences of ‘others’. Within the reflexive mode, the essay film is particularly useful for feminist filmmakers with complicated ties to the story being told. Films by Trinh T. Minh-ha, Agnes Varda, Chris Marker, and Patricio Guzman, made in essayistic style, provide guidance in my research and are discussed in this documentary review section.

Chapter 5

Representation and Documentary Film

As a feminist filmmaker, I am interested in exploring the space for creativity which emerges through the exploration of difference and plurality. Additionally, my research concerns the representation of gender in images of war. The images of war travel through time and space and shape the stories about the war that create a sense of nationalism. While these images conjure up the different dimensions of atrocities committed, making a case that genocide did take place, they are also subject to selective remembering and convenient editing and are interpreted and re-interpreted to suit the changing tides of time. The list of feminist filmmakers challenging the lack of representation of gendered violence in genocide is growing because of the power of the medium. My last documentary, *A Woman's Story* (2015), deals with three different genocides of the twentieth century – the Holocaust, the 1971 genocide in Bangladesh and the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Taking a transnational feminist approach, the film does not seek transcendence, but simply creates a space for women to share their stories with all the nuances and details specific to their experiences in genocide. *Calling the Ghosts* (1996), a documentary by Mandy Jacobson and Karmen Jelincic, documents the stories of Jadranka Cigelj and Nusreta Sivac, two childhood friends, who were taken to the rape camp of Omarska and were tortured and humiliated by their Serb captors. *God Sleeps in Rwanda* (2004) is a documentary by Kimberlee Acquaro and Stacy Sherman, which uncovers a story of survival in post-genocide Rwanda. Documentaries have the capacity to represent, to remember, and to bring accountability to discourses originating from

places of power. This section examines the power of documentaries in representing the issues that demand critical engagement and political commitment. I closely examine films made in observational and reflexive modes. Filmmakers attempting to give representation to marginalized voices often employ these strategies to either depict political struggle or to bring to the forefront the politics of representation in a given context. While documentaries made in an observational mode can be useful as a tool for social activism, the films made in a reflexive mode make room for transparency and accountability. Within the reflexive mode, the essay film foregrounds the subjectivity of the filmmaker, taking the accountability one step further and engaging directly with the politics of representation. The essay film is the most useful form for this research as the aim of this project is to make an intervention in the existing representations of genocide in Bangladesh. In this section, I also review films made by Kim Longinotto, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Agnes Varda, Chris Marker and Patricio Guzman and highlight their relevance to my current research undertaking. Also within the tradition of reflexive filmmaking is trauma cinema, which deals with questions of memory and remembering of traumatic events. I take a closer look at *Calling the Ghosts* (1996) as this film documents women's stories from the genocide in the Balkans and their search for justice. *Calling the Ghosts* demonstrates that feminist filmmakers with a transnational approach have the potential to put women at the centre of storytelling and challenge the silencing, selective remembering, and standardization of women's experiences and their representation in widely circulated media texts. Documentaries made by feminist filmmakers, such as Trinh, have in the past challenged the prevailing systems of representation and resist the

tendency of grouping together all the people or all the women into one unified category by highlighting the very question of representation and gender identity.

The term ‘documentaries’ was coined by John Grierson in the 1920s to name the practice of the creative treatment of reality, which would offer more direct access to actualities than that found in the reconstruction of narrative cinema (Corrigan 162). But since then the definition of “documentary” has been problematized and put into question by many film theorists. Bill Nichols, for instance, writes, “the definition of ‘documentary’ is always relational or comparative. ... [It] takes on meaning in contrast to fiction film or experimental and avant-garde film” (20). Linda Williams in *Mirrors without Memories: Truth, History, and the New Documentary* argues, “Instead of careening between idealistic faith in documentary truth and cynical recourse to fiction, we do better to define documentary not as an essence of truth but as a set of strategies designed to choose from among a horizon of relative and contingent truths” (14). Documentary, in its creative treatment of reality, does not seek to reproduce truth but represent it. As Williams argues in her work, while some form of truth is always a receding goal of documentary film, truth is figured by documentary as “a careful construction, an intervention in the politics and the semiotics of representation” (20). Documentary seeks to represent an aspect of the world as we understand it. It differs from fiction films in the degree of manipulation of truth and staged materials and their treatment. Using persuasive strategies, sounds and visuals, documentaries make arguments and try to not only inform viewers, but also convince them of their version of reality. As viewers, we bring to the world of documentary an assumption that the text’s sounds and images have their origin in the historical world we share (Nichols 35). The

moving image gets its evidentiary status from the presumed objectivity of the camera, even though the camera is operated by an individual with a past and present, feelings and biases, and a mind that interprets every image based on a pre-existing template. With its own take on reality, the camera and the camera operator take the viewer into the lives of those whom the viewers never would have known otherwise, and it confirms instances that might have happened in the past and biases that exist today. The elements that make the film, moving images, words and sounds, all carry meanings that must be decoded by the viewer with knowledge they already possess. To accomplish that, a trust is established between the viewer and the image producer that informs the consumption of the image as reality or depiction of a reality. In every frame of a documentary, the image-maker is trying to convince the image-viewer that this is what really happened and this is an honest truth. It is the viewer's trust and confidence in the image-maker and the image that helps mediate and construct meaning for the viewer, which sometimes can be far from reality. In representing reality, the treatment of the materials that comprise a documentary give this genre its sense of particularity (Nichols 26-27).

Bill Nichols writes about the various modes of representation that documentary filmmakers often employ in the framing of reality. Nichols writes, “new modes arise partly in response to perceived deficiencies in previous ones, but the perception of deficiency comes about partly from a sense of what it takes to present the historical world from a particular perspective at a given moment in time” (101). Among the many modes of representation available to filmmakers, the most relevant for my research are documentaries that use observational and reflexive modes to represent the experiences of ‘others’ across cultural and national boundaries. Documentaries made in observational

mode carry an evidentiary status due to their engagement with the everyday in the least obtrusive way possible and therefore can be a useful tool to depict political struggles and various resistance movements. The reflexive mode, by bringing into question the very materials that make the documentary, highlight the difference between reality and its representation and an individual's relationship to the modes of production. Since my film seeks to make an intervention in gender representations of war, both observational and reflexive modes require a closer look.

The Observational Mode

Observational documentary filmmakers have in the past been accorded the reputation of offering an unhindered access to reality. With the advent of technology came lightweight and portable cameras and portable lights, which filmmakers utilizing the observational technique argue help the filmmaker to enter a situation without altering the course of events, and they are able to do it solo, as a one-person shoot. Such documentaries follow individuals around, silently observe the events in the most unobtrusive manner possible, never ask individuals to repeat an action for camera and contain long takes that are meant to capture the entire event in the film. Moreover, these films by the virtue of minimal editing seemingly present close to nil manipulation. Observational documentaries claim to offer a closer look at a person's lived reality while abiding by the accepted aesthetic standards of cinematography and editing. In *When the Moon Waxes Red*, Trinh critiques this style of filming, "To value the long take as an attempt at eliminating distortions is, in a way, to say that life is a continuous process with no ruptures, no blanks, no blackouts. The longer, the truer" (57). According to Trinh, not

only does this style of videography conform with the rules of cinema aesthetics but with longer takes, it also builds an illusion of continuity and immortality, while "death strolls between images" (When the Moon Waxes Red 57). While done in the name of objectivity and authenticity, observational films disregard the subjectivity of an individual's point of view and the fact that other angles would offer a slightly or sometimes totally different view. The Observational mode treats the camera eye as a silent witness or as "objective" and without any pre-conceptions. However, it is impossible to separate the human eye behind the camera from the camera lens. What is captured by the lens is decided by the person behind the camera, who is also able to make sense of what is being shot and whether or not it is of any relevance or interest, aesthetically or in terms of what it is trying to depict. It is that eye and not the eye of the camera which decides if the course of events unfolding in front of the camera would be deemed important or boring by the viewer. The value of observational documentary is precisely in its selective manipulation of reality, with social conscientiousness that seeks to be the voice of the disenfranchised and marginalized, in bringing various social issues to light from one person's point of view.

The observational mode of Kim Longinotto's documentaries performs the function of "granting" voice to Third World subjects that Longinotto engages with in her practice. Kim Longinotto is known for her use of the observational technique of storytelling in her documentaries. With documentaries such as *Salma* (2013), filmed in India, *Pink Saris* (2010), also filmed in India; *Sisters in Law* (2005), set in West Cameroon; *Dream Girls* (1993), shot in Japan; and *Divorce Iranian Style* (1998), Longinotto is often lauded for her films about women across the globe. Longinotto makes

film with a cause and her approach to filmmaking is best-described by Patricia White as making sure that "The whole world is watching" (123). White considers Longinotto's film practice as rooted in transnational feminism in allowing agency to Third World subjects that Longinotto usually engages with in her films. While Longinotto's films seek to highlight the agency in her subjects by transforming lives and turning silent victims into advocates, the challenge lies in the unproblematised viewing position constructed through Longinotto's work. Longinotto, known for her "fly on the wall" and "silent witness" style of filmography, mobilizes questions of women's rights and moral values and attempts to build solidarity across boundaries. Since Longinotto works with local filmmakers, her documentaries are specific and concern regional issues, even though her idealized viewer remains Western. By narrativizing the stories of the cultural other – the women in Iran, India, West Cameroon etc. – for a Western audience, it is obvious that Longinotto is trying to paint a picture of what Trinh calls "out there for us in here" (When the Moon Waxes Red 35). Similar to their Western counterparts, the women featured in Longinotto's film are shown negotiating their space within a patriarchal society. In an attempt to mobilize universality in the struggle for rights, Longinotto's work often appears to offer a glimpse into the immediate present and transcends history; as a result women and their struggles are decontextualized. Through the intimacy of the close up shots, the viewer is carried to a reality that is foreign to them and does not problematize their viewing position.

The biggest challenge to the observational style of filmmaking is a lack of acknowledgment of the mediation of reality in the film, which often takes place in a kind of alliance building between subject and filmmakers (Smail 63). The absence of

reflexivity allows for a viewing position that is not problematized and can easily build alliances with the subject. This kind of alliance building, while well-intentioned, mediates the reality of the people featured in the documentary and gives rise to a kind of representation of reality that blurs the boundary between reality and its representation.

The Reflexive Mode

Concerned with the process of mediation in the name of providing evidence, reflexive documentary filmmakers pay a great deal of attention to the process of the making of meanings in a film. Films made in the reflexive mode acknowledge the camera and its restrictions and the problems posed to the issue of representation due to that. In *When the Moon Waxes Red*, Trinh T. Minh-ha questions the evidence of documentary by distinguishing truth from its meaning and argues that documentary puts forth as truth what is only a meaning (30). Truth is dramatized to make it more interesting and convincing. The framing of each shot, focusing on one thing while making everything else out of focus and irrelevant, using different kinds of lens and lights to make one thing more prominent than the other, the use of a directional microphone to make one sound more audible than the surrounding noise – are all things that in Trinh's approach provide evidence of mediation and manipulation of the truth, albeit inevitable and necessary in media productions. Trinh writes,

The close-up is condemned for its partiality, while the wide angle is claimed to be more objective because it includes more in the frame, hence it can mirror more faithfully the event-in-context. (The more, the larger, the truer – as if wider framing is less a framing than tighter shots.) (*When the Moon Waxes Red* 34)

Filmmakers with a reflexive approach are conscious of the process and acknowledge the impossibility of the representation of truth and draw a clear distinction between truth and its meaning. As Trinh argues, documentary filmmaking is observing and selecting from life itself (When the Moon Waxes Red 33). In her documentary *Reassemblage*, Trinh provides a critique of documentary filmmaking practiced universally as a collection of facts as opposed to fiction while also trying to maintain the aesthetic value of the film. Shot in Senegal, *Reassemblage* contains in random order images of dead animals, live animals and decaying animal carcass, dark screens and jump shots – all questioning the spatiotemporal continuity of a narrative. Trinh deliberately omits sound when people are clearly seen speaking on screen and at certain places she loops the audio, foregrounding the politics of representation in storytelling as the voice of the oppressed is channelled and lost in mediation. Questioning the existing representation of gender in genocide in order to highlight the distance between what is presented as the “truth” and its meaning is the main goal of my research. Since at the core of my research is the question of representation, the foregrounding of politics of representation in a reflexive approach to filmmaking is what makes it appealing for my project.

The emphasis on regional history, as seen in *Reassemblage* with a focus on the politics of progress and underdevelopment and inclusion and exclusion, is also relevant to my research. Trinh repeatedly says, "Scarcely 20 years was enough to make 2 billion people define themselves as 'underdeveloped'." Recounting an encounter with a peace corps volunteer who attempts to teach the village women how to grow vegetables in their garden for profit, Trinh says, "First create needs, then help." This modern-day spectacle of neocolonialism not only shows the mainstream discourse about the ‘Other’, it also

encapsulates the Western mandate to educate the Third World "savages" as a rationalization for economic exploitation. The stereotypical images from a faraway, exotic land show a suffering that is unusual and unbelievable for most Western viewers, while also confirming for them that this is the norm over there, in the poor and backward part of the world, known as Africa. Through her work, Trinh confronts wide-ranging stereotypes about African people. While most viewers might be used to seeing images of famine and disease-ridden people, the dead and the dying in full view, on display like images on the walls of an upscale gallery, Trinh chooses to show images of healthy children at play and women milling grains. Trinh raises questions of universality and sameness, and the answers make room for difference. In Trinh's explorations, difference is not opposed to sameness; difference also doesn't mean separateness; but it is simply acknowledged. This articulation of difference in reflexive filmmaking is particularly useful for my research as I attempt to distinguish the national memory from women's memory of the war of 1971, but also in highlighting the differences that exist between the experiences of women belonging to various ethnic and religious groups.

In locating the meaning of the image, Trinh raises important questions regarding where the meaning gets made between the image, the image-maker, and the image-consumer and creates a dialogue between various subjectivities. The narrative of the film bounces between the personal, the factual and the abstract universal. Trinh's dismissal of an ethnologist's account of truth about a culture is arguably a personal and intellectual exercise. The issues of representation and ethnography are foregrounded in the images and further emphasized through Trinh's voice-over. Through her stated membership to the community of ethnographers and researchers, Trinh engages in self-reflexivity.

Filming in Africa means for many of us colourful images, naked breast women, exotic dances and fearful rites. The unusual. ... Ethnologists handle the camera, the way they handle words. recuperated, collected, preserved. the Bamun, the Bassari, the Bobo. What are your people called again? An ethnologist asked a fellow of his.
(An excerpt from *Reassemblage*)

It is indeed her own expressive subjectivity as an ethnographer, who is an outsider commenting on the culture of the insider, that Trinh challenges in her work.

Reassemblage carries all the demarcations of outsider and insider, and the discontinuity in visuals and sound captures that which cannot be captured or translated in an outsider's account of a culture. *Reassemblage* features an expressive self, which forces the viewers to engage in a dialogue and rethink the defining features of that self. For my research, the insider/outside status of a researcher with complicated ties to the region creates a position that demands accountability. For that reason, the most appropriate form of representation for my project is the essay film, which is within the tradition of reflexive mode of documentaries.

The Essay Film

In "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Camera Stylo," Alexandre Astruc argues that the meaning is found within the image itself,

... in the development of the narrative, in every gesture of the characters, in every line of dialogue, in those camera movements which relate objects to objects and characters to objects. All thought, like all feeling, is a relationship between one human being and another human being or certain objects which form part of his universe. It is by clarifying these relationships, by making a tangible allusion, that the cinema can really make itself the vehicle of thought. (183)

Astruc makes room for subjective filmmaking by placing cinematic expression at the meeting point of personal and literary. In his brief essay, he critiques attempts to preserve the images of an era and encourages creating a new language for cinematic expression that can portray any kind of reality, just like a literary essay: “The film-maker/author writes with his camera as a writer writes with his pen” (183). *The Camera Stylo* laid the foundation for authorial cinema, with essay-like and flexible writing, which allowed the expression of space and temporalities in more efficient and creative ways than what was previously accepted as the norm of narrative cinema. *The Camera Stylo* also made room for personal expression of a worldview, a philosophy of life. As Timothy Corrigan notes, it was due to Astruc’s writings in conjunction with technological progress and several specific films that marked the broader practical and conceptual shift to what came to be known as the essay film (66).

Corrigan formulates the essay film as a testing of expressive subjectivity through experiential encounters in the public arena, the product of which becomes the figuration of thinking or thought as a cinematic address and a spectatorial response (2011). The authorial voice of the filmmaker, which is considered one of the most recognizable signs of an essay film, makes visible the articulation and subjectivity of the filmmaker. It not only creates transparency but also accountability for a specific positioning of a knowing self, rendering it the most useful form of film to transnational feminist filmmakers. Instead of claiming access to a universal truth, the filmmaker makes transparent the various visual possibilities and viewing positions, and focuses on one point of view which is most accessible to the filmmaker, which is her own. In essay films, as Laura Rascaroli writes in *The Personal Camera*, “meanings are presented by a speaking subject

as a personal, subjective mediation, rather than as objective truths. It is this subjective move, this speaking in the first person that mobilizes the subjectivity of the spectator” (36). The essayistic filmmakers, such as Agnes Varda, Patricio Guzman, Chris Marker and Trinh T. Minh-ha, offer the spectator a representation of social reality through their expressive subjectivity and self-reflexivity, which the viewer can either accept or reject. But, as Rascaroli argues, the essay structure implies a certain unity of the human experience, “which allows two subjects to meet and communicate on the basis of such a shared experience. The two subject positions, the ‘I’ and the ‘you’, determine and shape one another” (36). It is this articulation of the essay film, which allows multiplicity, and renders it the most appropriate form of research-creation methodology and the most useful to feminist filmmakers and researchers with a transnational approach. This dialogue between expressive subjectivity and the viewer is what allows people to see connections and differences. *The Gleaners and I* (2000) by Agnes Varda, *Sans Soleil* (1983) by Chris Marker, *Nostalgia for the Light* (2010) by Patricio Guzman, and *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989) by Trinh T. Minh-ha each offer a unique strategy in their formulation of the essay film. While adhering to the most basic and defining feature of the essay film, namely a testing of expressive subjectivity through experiential encounters in the public arena that provoke a dialogue with the viewer, these films encounter different publics and express different strategies for self-reflexivity and expression of subjectivity. The expression of subjectivity in these films is rooted in a place of vulnerability and demands the essayistic subject take risks, engage in self-reflexivity and find comfort in a self that is destabilized but better-suited to enter into a dialogic relationship with the viewers. This destabilized self is not about transcendence, it

is situated in a specific location with situated knowledge; it maintains the authorial voice of the filmmaker while trying to find connections with the viewer. It is able to construct and deconstruct ways of seeing, while also seeking perspective from different viewing positions. As feminist cultural theorist Donna Haraway writes,

The split and contradictory self is the one who can interrogate positionings and be accountable, the one who can construct and join rational conversations and fantastic imaginings that change history. Splitting, not being, is the privileged image for feminist epistemologies of scientific knowledge. 'Splitting' in this context should be about heterogeneous multiplicities that are simultaneously necessary and incapable of being squashed into isomorphic slots or cumulative lists. (193)

The transnational feminist notion of situated knowledge finds home in the expressive subjectivity of the essay film. By allowing differences, plurality and a possibility of joining together, the transnational feminist approach to filmmaking does not attempt to transcend history but makes room for specificity and a more honest representation of a dialogic relationship between the filmmaker and the viewer.

Trinh's *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* addresses some of the issues that are also relevant for my film. Similarly to my project, her film calls attention to the ways in which meanings are produced in culture, between words and corporeality. Set in Vietnam, the film problematizes representation, translation, and filmmaking practices. It also raises important questions of gender, cultural and social identity and using a shifting frame during the interviews it underlines the fluidity of identity. Writing of culture as a way to challenge the hegemonic narrative of a culture is an intervention not only presented in Trinh's work through the traditional folklore of Vietnam but that task is also performed by her film itself. Her intervention in the hegemonic narrative of Vietnamese culture and politics of appropriation inspire my project. The politics of storytelling and appropriation

of one's story for the sake of a cause is brought to the forefront. She contrasts the feminist poetry of Ho Xuan Huong, which is met with significant resistance in the collective memory, with *The Tale of Kieu*, and the place the two stories occupy in the hegemonic narrative of a culture. *The Tale of Kieu* by Nguyen Du, also written in the early nineteenth century, is considered a national epic poem that recounts a woman's sacrifice for her father and her brother, as she is forced by circumstances to sell her body, first become a prostitute, then a concubine, a servant and a nun before she is able to come back to her first lover. Kieu's love life and sacrifice, as Trinh points out, have become a metaphor for Vietnam's destiny and the fate of Vietnamese women. Kieu is a perfect model for feminine Confucian ideals and loyalty. The sacrifice attributed to her continues to be taught and expected of Vietnamese women today. *The Tale of Kieu* brings to mind the appropriation of Rokeya Sakhawat's story *Sultana's Dream* by nationalist forces in Bangladesh to create a representation of Bengali woman as someone who is empowered and celebrated. The ease with which a poem about Kieu, a cultural text already inscribed with meaning, has entered the national and collective memory and come to define what it means to be a Vietnamese woman, is a paradoxical work of translation. Trinh narrates: "Translation seeks faithfulness and accuracy and ends up always betraying either the letter of the text, its spirit, or its aesthetics. The original text is always already an impossible translation that renders translation impossible," and "grafting several languages, cultures and realities onto a single body. The problem of translation, after all, is a problem of reading and of identity" (Surname Viet, Given Name Nam). Instead of acknowledging the complexity of love and sexuality, Kieu's story has been given a revisionist interpretation of Confucian principles of a woman's loyalty (Framer Framed

60). To preserve Vietnamese heritage, a Vietnamese woman is told that she must acknowledge the authority of her father, husband and son, and observe the four virtues: be skillful in domestic duties, maintain a gracious and compliant appearance, speak softly, and know a woman's place. In this film women speak from various positions, and experiences are mediated by Trinh in complex ways. She calls attention to the ways in which meanings are produced in culture, between words and corporeality. The interviews and their re-enactment, the folklore and the filmmaker's commentary all come together to depict the struggle to name experiences and their representations. The interviews recount the years of war that called upon women to make sacrifices for their family and their country, just like Kieu, and pushed them further into oblivion. It is through the impossible work of translation within culture and media that the identity of Vietnamese woman is created, both gendered and nationalistic. This identity is doubly marginalized within a system of patriarchy and in a nation fractured by decades of war.

War as a succession of special effects; the war became film well before it was shot. Cinema has remained a vast machine of special effects. If the war is the continuation of politics by other means, then media images are the continuation of war by other means. Immersed in the machinery, part of the special effect, no critical distance. Nothing separates the Vietnam war and the superfilms that were made and continue to be made about it. It is said that if the Americans lost the other, they have certainly won this one. (Excerpt from Surname Viet, Given Name Nam)

The images of war travel through time and space and shape the stories about the war; they are subject to selective remembering and convenient editing and are interpreted and re-interpreted to suit the changing tides of time. Trinh's film, through its self-reflexivity, is a direct intervention in that work of translation and that is the work I hope to accomplish through my doctoral film.

Agnes Varda's *The Gleaners and I*, presents an important instance in the history of the essay film. The film not only engages the viewer in a dialogue but *Two Years Later* which follows the original film also solicits and incorporates viewers and participants to engage in what Corrigan calls "a dialogic rethinking of the first film" (70). *The Gleaners and I* is a meditation on the practice of "gleaning", of which Varda provides a dictionary definition as gathering after the harvest, historically by women. In her film, Varda moves from historic paintings that depict women gleaning to modern-day gleaners; the urban gleaners and the rural gleaners; the gleaners of food and the gleaners of thoughts; and herself as a gleaner. We get to meet the gleaners in the French countryside, gathering the surplus crops left behind by the growers and harvesters, including things like potatoes, grapes, apples and oysters. We also meet a psychoanalyst who is not only gleaning people's thoughts and worries but also provides a reflection on life and death and redefines gleaning in ways similar to the essayistic identity as a productive activity, which is "a subversion or rejection of the authority and primacy of subjectivity and selfhood, enunciated by a language that fails to offer any stable place or meaning – even for auteurist self-portrait" (Corrigan 71). Varda introduces us to the urban gleaners and their activism, salvaging scraps from bins and vegetables from stalls after the markets have closed. Reminiscent of Trinh's claim in *Reassemblage*, "Different views from different angles... the a, b, c of photography," Varda shows us three different interpretations of an incident involving young homeless people prosecuted for gleaning the trash cans outside a supermarket. As Varda notes, the supermarket manager, the judge, and the gleaning urban youths "each experiences it differently." By showing more than one version of the incident, Varda is allowing the viewer a more personal and

subjective experience and the option to choose their own path in this dialogue. Finally, there's Varda herself, a gleaner of images, driving around France with a digital camera, gathering images and actively engaging in the politics of waste. Varda takes the expression of subjectivity by the essayistic subject to yet another level through self-portrait. She videotapes with one hand, her other hand, trying to retain things as trucks pass in the background. This expression of subjectivity is decoded in *Two Years Later* when someone pointed out to Varda that the shots of her hands and other close-ups in *The Gleaners and I* resemble shots from her film about her dead filmmaker partner. Varda's collection of images then become her ultimate act of expressing her subjectivity by trying to retain things and life that has been lost. For the purpose of this research, Varda's attempt at showing the same story from different perspectives, in addition to the framing of her own subjectivity in the telling of the story creates a position of transparency and accountability in which difference is not treated as a burden, but experienced simply as a reality. This provides the perfect model for expressing the various subjectivities in my research.

Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil* is another important film for my research as it deals with questions of memory, time and space. *Sans Soleil*, which takes the form of a video diary, is considered an excursive essay film, defined by Corrigan as an organization less coherent than the serial form of travelogues and with a dislocated essayist who engages in a self-reflexive dialogue as he passes through space (112). As the essayistic subject travels through boundaries, it encounters, tests and experiences some version of the real as a public elsewhere (Corrigan 35). This encounter is mediated through an intellectual engagement and reflexivity that guides the viewer's subjectivity. This way of guiding the

viewer in the process of meaning-making is particularly useful for a research-creation project where the creative work is rooted in research and intellectual engagement instead of a simple consumption of truth and reality. The destabilized subject traveling through space and time encourages a dialogic relationship between the essayistic subject and the viewer. In *Sans Soleil*, Chris Marker highlights the politics of memory and forgetting in the writing of history as they are encountered and experienced by the essayistic subject who travels through space and time. Laura Rascaroli attributes a museal sensibility to Chris Marker's work because it captures and stores traces of time and events from the past (67). Marker brings to attention the act of remembering by Krasna of the various realities and publics he encountered in his travels, presented to viewers as random drifts, as opposed to a coherent version of the past, which would have been lost if it were not for cinema as a technology of remembrance.

Also relevant to my research is Patricio Guzman's *Nostalgia for the Light* (2010) as the essayistic subject navigates the Atacama Desert and, using the metaphor of astronomy, explores the discovery of human remains by the family members of those who were killed by the Pinochet regime. Guzman foregrounds his subjectivity by talking about his passion for astronomy as rooted in his childhood in Chile. The astronomers' task of studying the past is likened to the search for answers and remains by the relatives of those who were killed, but with a distinction. Encountering the past by the survivors is not only met with resistance by the authorities but it also marks a revisiting of trauma. Guzman explores the theme of memory in numerous ways, including the drawings made by an architect named Miguel. Miguel was imprisoned in a concentration camp and while he was held there memorized the plans in order to draw them again once he was set free.

Guzman narrates, “I am convinced that memory has a gravitational force. It is constantly attracting us. Those who have a memory are able to live in the fragile present moment. Those who have none don't live anywhere” (Excerpt from *Nostalgia for the Light*). While Miguel is trying to remember, his wife Anita who is suffering from Alzheimer’s disease is forgetting. This struggle between remembering and forgetting captivates the national memory of Chile in *Nostalgia for the Light* and makes it an important text for my research as I explore the relationship between national forgetting and women’s remembering of the gendered violence of the war of 1971.

Both *Nostalgia for the Light* and *Sans Soleil* explore the complex relationship of discovery, memory and representation. These films remind us that events from the past are not available for simple representation, and present us instead with “the awareness of the final inaccessibility of a moment of crime, violence, trauma, irretrievably located in the past” (Williams 17). As seen in Guzman’s and Marker’s films, the past is witnessed only as a trace in the present, as an incomplete and fragmented memory.

Trauma Cinema

Representations of memory, especially when dealing with trauma in documentary form has not been an easy task as the memories of survivors dealing with a traumatic event are often fragmented, if not entirely inaccessible. Cathy Caruth provides a general definition of trauma as:

Trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. (Unclaimed Experience 11)

In her work to articulate and theorize trauma, Caruth turns to psychoanalysis to demarcate the boundary between knowing and not knowing. Recollection of a traumatic event is not a simple memory. For Caruth, it is the unexperienced nature of the event that gives rise to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD. Caruth writes, “what returns in the flashback is not simply an overwhelming experience that has been obstructed by a later repression or amnesia, but an event that is itself constituted, in part, by its lack of integration into consciousness” (Trauma: Explorations in Memory 152). What it means for a survivor is that a recollection of a traumatic event lies not only in the facts that could be corroborated but also on the way their occurrence defies comprehension. Recollection or memory of a traumatic event then becomes an event in itself. The existing psychoanalytic research on trauma offers an explanation to account for omissions and elisions in the memories of survivors seen in documentaries that deal with traumatic events. Dori Laub in *Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening* documents a Holocaust survivor’s recollection of what she experienced in Auschwitz. The survivor remembered seeing four burning chimneys during the Auschwitz uprising and thought it was “unbelievable” (59). Later on, the accuracy of the woman’s account was questioned as only one chimney was destroyed and not all four. But Laub argues that the woman was not testifying to the simple historical facts but to the survival and resistance and the unbelievability of what she had witnessed. Trauma as witnessed by this particular survivor was not only about what she suffered through but also a departure from the site of trauma and its recurrence in her recollection of it. However, as Dori Laub writes, there is a need in all survivors to tell and thus to come to know their stories. She writes, “One has to know one’s buried truth in order to be able to live one’s life” (63).

Film studies scholar Janet Walker, in her explorations of trauma cinema, has looked closely at memory and remembering. She insists that we read visual representations of subjects dealing with trauma in reference to outside sources, as a “question of correspondence – and loss of correspondence – between recollection and actual past events” (The Vicissitudes of Traumatic Memory and the Postmodern History Film 139). Films that explore such a relationship of correspondence between traumatic memory and historical truth have come to define trauma cinema. In *Trauma Cinema: Documenting Incest and the Holocaust*, Walker defines trauma films as, “those that deal with traumatic events in a nonrealist mode characterized by disturbance and fragmentation of the films’ narrative and stylistic regimes” (19). Walker distinguishes trauma films from other documentary films for not attempting to invoke in spectators the identification with the subject. Drawing on her definition of “disremembering”, which is remembering with a difference, Walker’s articulation of trauma films situates them within the tradition of a reflexive approach to filmmaking. Walker writes that trauma films,

‘disremember’ by drawing on innovative strategies for representing reality obliquely, by looking to mental processes for inspiration, and by incorporating self-reflexive devices to call attention to the friability of the scaffolding for audiovisual historiography. (Trauma Cinema 19)

Trauma Cinema does not adhere to the norms of the observational style of filmmaking, as the “fly-on-the-wall” approach of Cinema Vérité and its claim to truth do not hold in the case of a survivor of a traumatic event trying to recount her experiences. Trauma cinema presents fragments of memory that are often abstract, rooted in fantasy, and even contradictory to other known facts or testimonies. These films emphasize the subjectivity

of the testimony and invite the audiences to engage with the truths that are contingent, imperfect, and inconclusive. In engaging with the truth, the testimony demands that connections be made by the audiences between multiple fragments contained within the testimony. It also creates a dialogic relationship with the audiences as the testimony creates secondary witnesses in the audiences who are on the receiving end of the testimony's words, memories and stories. These attributes of trauma cinema create a possibility for connection to my film as the survivors recall their trauma and tell stories that are often inconclusive, imperfect and not easily corroborated.

Trauma films in the past have been used to enhance fact-finding missions by “foregrounding history as a problem of memory and interpretation as well as one of data collection” (Walker, *The Vicissitudes of Traumatic Memory and the Postmodern History Film* 141). The testimonies that form these trauma films have been summoned for the cause of social justice, as has been the case in *Calling the Ghosts*. *Calling the Ghosts* is a documentary film by Mandy Jacobson and Karmen Jelincic and deals with the genocide in the former Yugoslavia. The film offers the testimonies of two female survivors Jadranka Cigelj and Nusreta Sivac, who were taken to the Omarska camp where they were tortured and raped repeatedly by the Serbs. Having survived the ordeal, Cigelj's testimony in the documentary is part of her bigger fight for justice at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague. The film chronicles the transformation of Cigelj from being a woman haunted by her rape and torture to becoming an activist and fighting for justice. Janet Walker in her research (2005, 2008, and 2010) has noted that talking about that which was previously silenced provides the survivors agency and may help them with the healing process.

Additionally, the film gives evidence of the lingering trauma that these women experience, including insomnia, depression, kidney problems, and the fear of touch (Hesford 213). The film shows the psychological trauma of survivors as many of them continue to live in fear – a fear of divorce from their husbands and repercussions by the perpetrators – if they gave testimony. Offering testimony demands that the survivor live the trauma again, or using Caruth's terms, creates another event of trauma. In a reflexive move, *Calling the Ghosts* engages the viewers to interrogate their own complicity in the passive reproduction and consumption of narratives of war through direct address by Cigelj, when she comments, "War is boring when it is someone else's," and

The world watches coldly, while everything passes through women's bodies. Destroying a woman is destroying the essence of a nation. When they were killing and raping older women, they were killing and raping living history. When they were raping younger women, they were destroying future generations. (Excerpt from *Calling the Ghost*)

In a reflexive mode, *Calling the Ghosts* highlights the complexity of representing trauma when after Cigelj's testimony the viewer is faced with a subject looking away from the camera, smoking a cigarette and sharing the uncomfortable silence. It is in this moment that, as Linda Williams wrote, the awareness of the inaccessibility of a moment of crime, violence and trauma, is irretrievably located in the past. It is a moment that challenges the passive consumption of women's trauma, which is often afforded by media technologies that promote increasingly unhindered and seemingly unmediated access to reality. It also signifies women's relationship to representational strategies and media technologies, especially when an account of their trauma is solicited in front of a camera.

The representation of gender creates a complex power dynamic that has been problematized by feminist scholars and filmmakers, as it often presents itself in the binary of marginalized/represented, oppressed/oppressor, and man/woman. In *When the Moon Waxes Red* Trinh writes that oppression can be located both in the story told and in the telling of the story (6). The representation of gender in the nationalist discourses on genocide reproduces the ideology of gender and mirrors the social relations seen within nationalism. In my doctoral research, I am interested in highlighting the story of gender, its appropriation and its absence in the existing narratives of the war of 1971 that continue to be patriarchal and oppressive towards women. To challenge the national memory of the war, I turn to women's testimonies and explore the difference and tension between the two rememberings. The grounding of essayistic subjectivity seen in Agnes Varda and Patricio Guzman's films, the exploration of memory in Chris Marker's films, and the questioning in Trinh T. Minh-ha's film of framing and translating of women's stories are particularly useful for my project.

Chapter 6

RESEARCH-CREATION

Naristhan/Ladyland employs the camera lens and the practice of feminist filmmaking to challenge the various systems of power that seek to appropriate or silence the narratives that are considered excessive to national memory. Instead of a universal sisterhood approach of feminism, I explore the multilayered power relations that figure in the ways genocide is experienced by women. Building on Inderpal Grewal's articulation of nation, culture, and history as "sites of enunciation" for feminist struggle (1994), my research critically examines the locations of multiple subjectivities from which the genocide of 1971 was experienced by women. In *Women, War and the Making of Bangladesh*, Yasmin Saikia has used a multi-sited ethnographic research methodology that combines oral history with archival materials. Saikia emphasizes in her work the need for "polyversal narratives" to account for the diverse memories of the 1971 war that may create a history of war that is not in circulation in the public sphere (*Women, War and the Making of Bangladesh* 4). Since my research deals with the mediation and translation of existing cultural texts, culminating in a counter-narrative in the form of a film, the most appropriate methodology for this work is research-creation. This chapter sets the foundation for doing research-creation work and emphasizes the advances made in this relatively new methodology in qualitative research by Canadian researchers, such as Kim Sawchuk and Owen Chapman. My investigations in this project foreground my subjectivity as a researcher and filmmaker and as a woman with ties to the politics and history of South Asia. I offer in this section a brief discussion on the essayistic subject,

the questions of identity and the complex insider/outsider status that not only I had to grapple with, but which has been a recurring theme for many transnational feminists, including Saikia, Trinh and Jayati Lal. Next in this section is an overview of the process of researching in Bangladesh and making of *Naristhan/Ladyland*. The film reproduces the national memory of the war through the archives of the Liberation War Museum in Bangladesh and relies on the testimonies of four survivors. The testimonies in this project are key to the intervention in the existing discourses on gendered experiences of war. I examine the works of Janet Walker and Primo Levi to establish the status of testimonies in research into a historical event. Voiceover also plays a crucial role in this film as it helps to frame my voice as a researcher and offer moments of reflection on the audio and video that appear on the screen. With the testimonies of four survivors and archival representations from the war museum, my research attempts to create an account of the 1971 war that is more inclusive than the current official national memory. To create a counter-narrative and make research accessible to a wider public, the advances made in cultural studies to bridge the gap between academic research and cultural practices are particularly useful.

In “The Emergence of Cultural Studies and the Crisis of the Humanities,” Stuart Hall emphasizes the need to understand, describe and theorize cultural change by placing it within the realm of political reality. Understanding the people who were a part of the culture meant a necessary bridging of the world of academia with the “dirty outside world,” (12) and incorporating practice into research was the only way of doing that. Hall writes:

The remorseless march of the division of knowledge and the gap between theory and practice is not to be overcome by wishing to

do so or by declaring that it has just happened. The gap between theory and practice is only overcome in developing a practice in its own right. It is a practice to bring together theory and practice. It had to be done. And the vocation of intellectuals is not simply to turn up at the right demonstrations at the right moment, but also to alienate that advantage which they have had out of the system, to take the whole system of knowledge itself and, in Benjamin's sense, attempt to put it at the service of some other project. (The Emergence of Cultural Studies and the Crisis of the Humanities 18)

The Center for Cultural Studies, established at the University of Birmingham in the 1960s, put the system of knowledge and the vocation of intellectuals at the service of culture, practice and the lived reality of people. The activist intervention of cultural studies rendered practice-based research an essential part of studying culture and as communicative of problems and solutions within society.

The decentering of cultural studies has injected practice into theory and raised interest in the everyday, allowing researchers and practitioners creative ways of doing theory. As Patricia Leavy writes in *Method Meets Art*, “Arts-based research practices are a set of methodological tools used by qualitative researchers across the disciplines during all phases of social research, including data collection, analysis, interpretation, and representation” (2-3). Leavy in her intervention writes about visual data and the visual representation of data, including visual cultural archaeology, the participatory creation of art, and the collage method (215-33). *Collage* is articulated as a method of gathering, selecting, analysis, synthesis and presentation (Leavy 222). *Visual arts-based participatory methods* involve research participants creating art that ultimately serves as both data and may also represent data (Leavy 227). *Visual cultural archaeology* is defined as a method for accessing the ways in which visual culture creates images of normalcy and otherness, allowing a study of dominance and oppression in culture (Leavy

221). Leavy's research offers an important point of departure from the widely accepted methods of doing research. Efforts by researchers at Concordia University in Canada, such as Sawchuk, Chapman, and McCartney, to theorize research-creation within the existing framework of viable qualitative research methodologies advances the discussion for the purpose of my project. It is due to the efforts of these and other researchers that since 2013 the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) recognizes the importance of research-creation in the social sciences and humanities, and the expertise of artist-researchers, and has integrated research-creation as an eligible research activity across its many programs. SSHRC defines "'research-creation' as a creative process that comprises an essential part of a research activity, and fosters the development and renewal of knowledge through aesthetic, technical, instrumental or other innovations" (SSHRC website). Making room for the expertise of artist-researchers opens doors for scholars and artists to create knowledge that takes into account cultural industries in various ways and advances important debates in society. Chapman and Sawchuk argue in their article, "Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and 'Family Resemblances'," research creation is not a fixed methodological approach. It can, in fact, take the form of research-for-creation, research-from-creation, creative presentations of research, and creation-as-research – the four modalities not being mutually exclusive. In any creative work, it is common practice for some basic research to precede creation or production; similarly, it is often the case that the existing creative works, especially audio/visual archives, help with research; and researchers have always strived to find ways to creatively present their research findings. Finally, creation-as-research, deemed the most controversial and complex of research-creation methods by Chapman and Sawchuk, is

research-through-creation (19). However, in the world of qualitative research, writing – a creative practice – is generally accepted as a viable way of knowing and a method of inquiry. Writing as a method of inquiry highlights the centrality of language as a tool to construct meaning and social reality, while also making room for self-reflexivity. In “Writing: A Method of Inquiry,” Laurel Richardson argues for a post-modernist position on writing that would “allow us to know ‘something’ without claiming to know everything” (518). In literary studies, it has long been understood that different styles of writing convey different messages or, put simply, how we write affects what we write about. If writing is a valid method of inquiry and, as argued by the Camera Stylo movement, filmmaking is akin to writing an essay – both with subjectivity front and centre – it would not require a radical leap of faith to assert that creative practices, such as filmmaking, can also be considered a method of inquiry, and creation-as-research offers a possibility to do just that. As Sawchuk and Chapman argue,

“Creation-as-research” involves the elaboration of projects where creation is required in order for research to emerge. It is about investigating the relationship between technology, gathering and revealing through creation ... while also seeking to extract knowledge from the process. Research is more or less the end goal in this instance, although the “results” produced also include the creative production that is entailed, as both a tracing-out and culminating expression of the research process. (19)

Creation-as-research offers a unique way of knowing while also engaging with theory. Moving images offer a way to frame questions and politics of representation and have the potential of destabilizing and intervening in the dominant narratives. Within the realm of creative practices, the essay film – situated at the intersection of personal, subjective and social history – has emerged as the leading non-fiction form for both intellectual and

artistic innovation. Since the subject of inquiry for my research is the politics of discourse, the appropriation and visual representation of women's stories within the discourse on genocide, it is therefore logical to use creative tools as a way to explore that tense relationship.

The Essayistic Subject

My essay film on the 1971 genocide in Bangladesh makes a conscious effort to distance itself from any claims of universality of women's experiences in war. My investigations, including theoretical groundings and interviews, in this project remain within the realm of reflexivity commonly found in a transnational feminist approach to filmmaking, in particular the essay film. The women featured in the film only speak for themselves and are not called upon to embody an entire nation. Without making a claim to some universal truth, it is my subjectivity as a filmmaker that tells the story of women and genocide in this film. My interest in gender politics and filmmaking predates this present research undertaking. My choice to study and create an essay film on the multiplicity of women's experiences in the 1971 genocide in Bangladesh is shaped by my involvement in women's rights activism and a career in broadcast journalism and filmmaking. More relevant than my first film on homelessness in Toronto is my documentary film on rape and status of women in Pakistan. *Dishonour Defied* (2007) is a film about Mukhtar Mai, a woman from a remote village in Pakistan who was gang raped on the orders of a tribal council to avenge the honour of the affluent tribe as it was alleged that her brother had an affair with a woman from that tribe. The film chronicles her fight for justice and along the way we learn about the stories of other women and

girls who went through a similar ordeal. My next film, *Unveiling the Abuse* (2010), dealt with the issue of forced marriages in Canada and featured the story of a woman from South Asian background, who was forced into marriage twice by her family. At a showing of the film in Toronto, the post-screening discussion focused on women in South Asia and a young Bengali-Canadian girl asked me about women and the war of 1971. That moment marked the beginning of my investigations into the war of 1971. While researching for the film, I realized how little people in the west knew about the war, let alone incorporating it into the wider discourses on gender and genocide. As a result, I created my most recent film, *A Woman's Story* (2015), featuring intimate portraits of three female survivors from the Holocaust, the 1971 genocide in Bangladesh and the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. This was an attempt to bring Bangladesh into the discourses on genocide and more importantly to rid the existing discourses on genocide of their gender neutrality. *A Woman's Story* also set the ground for my current project.

My doctoral research focusing on the multiplicity of women's experiences in genocide is a natural next step in my career as a feminist filmmaker who is interested in making space for women's stories. In addition to my work as a filmmaker, my subjectivity in this project is framed in terms of my own politics of identity and belonging. As a woman whose grandparents left India in 1947 to live in East Pakistan and left Bangladesh in 1971 for Pakistan before immigrating to Canada in 1997, I saw identities change within the span of one generation. Here I find Stuart Hall's articulation of identities particularly useful as "the positions which the subject is obliged to take up while always 'knowing' that they are representations, that representation is always constructed across a 'lack', across a division, from the place of the Other, and thus can

never be adequate – identical – to the subject processes which are invested in them”

(Introduction: Who needs ‘Identity’? 4). My identities in this context have been those of the ‘other’, as a Bihari in post-1971 Pakistan, as a Pakistani in Canada, and as a woman. As a result of the fluctuating identities, I embody a curious insider/outsider status in my research – an insider as a woman with complex ties to the region and an outsider as a researcher and filmmaker who had never visited Bangladesh before taking on this research project. I elaborate on my insider/outsider status further below.

Growing up in Pakistan, I saw my family remember East Pakistan with a great sense of nostalgia. The indirect memories and the materiality of old family photographs from East Pakistan comprised a personal archive which was neither fully accessible to me nor could it ever be denied, as living in Pakistan we were constantly reminded of our status as outsiders through political, cultural and social policies. My family is originally from Bihar, India. At the time of the 1947 partition, my grandfather was working for the railway and opted for Pakistan. By all accounts, my family enjoyed a prosperous life in cities big and small, like Dhaka, Santahar, Khulna and Saidpur. My father was born in Santahar and raised in Saidpur. His memories comprise not only the banalities of the life of a teenager but also the rift that existed between Bengalis and Urdu-speaking Biharis. He remembers his Bengali Mathematics teacher who overcame the language divide in the community and promoted learning for everyone. He remembers playing cricket with his friends, relationships with his neighbours, deaths and births in the family. In his teenage years, he saw the oppression of the Bengalis and at the age of 15, in the 1970 general election helped with the Awami League campaign. After the elections, as the government refused to hand over power to Sheikh Mujib’s Awami League, my grandparents saw a

political turmoil on the horizon and sent my father off to Karachi, West Pakistan. After the war was officially started, my grandparents with the rest of their children and extended family members took a journey by the sea spanning several days and nights in April 1971 to Karachi.

During my fieldwork in 2015, my father visited Bangladesh for the first time in 45 years. With him, I revisited his memories of Dhaka, Saidpur and Khulna. He told me about one of his relatives in Santahar who survived the attack by Bengalis only because she was buried under the dead bodies of her family members. In Saidpur, he showed me the train station where my grandfather worked and the place where hundreds of Hindus and Bengalis were locked in a train and set afire. Anecdotes, as Meaghan Morris writes in *Banality in Cultural Studies* (1988), offer more than a point of connection for the speaker and the addressee. Morris writes, “anecdotes for me are not expressions of personal experience, but allegorical expositions of a model of the way the world can be said to be working.” These stories from my father, on their own, provide knowledge of the kind of atrocities that took place in the war of 1971 and the violence that all communities in East Pakistan faced at the time. Morris talks about social facts and lived reality of people in articulating difference and power relations. She challenges the perceived “universalism” of Western European thought as “actually limited—or ‘place-based’, even parochial—in their descriptive, let alone their predictive, value; they help to produce, from a particular position, the phenomena they claim to describe” (Future Fear, 36). Rejecting the notion of objectivity, which is often considered universal, societal, and limitless, Morris is opting for subjectivity in her writing, which she allows to be sentimental, personal, and on individual horizon. By emphasizing situated knowledge and speaking positions,

Morris is able to create a vocabulary that can contextualize a cultural event that might be in need of interpretation at a global level. The language created by Morris makes room for us to know something about a culture, a local event, without making any claims to know everything. The anecdotes, when put in a narrative about the lived reality of war in a local, and social discursive context, paint a picture of a conflict, which is often too complicated for the dominant discourses. My father's memories of East Pakistan connect me to the region personally and historically and confer on me the "insider" status.

I am also an insider as a woman from that part of the world. To a certain extent, I understand gender in that society – as an identity constructed at the intersection of colonialism, class, ethnicity and religion, where women who are aware of the systems of patriarchy struggle and those who are not aware continue to internalize these systems and take on the roles that are ascribed to them within patriarchy. The dominant patriarchal social relations show themselves in the control that is exercised over women's bodies even before they are born – gender selective abortions, poor treatment of the girl child at home, inaccessibility of education and employment, and in more extreme cases domestic violence, acid attack, rape and honour killing. For a vast majority of women belonging to the middle or lower socio-economic classes of the society, these life conditions factor into everyday life in South Asia. This had been my observation growing up in Karachi and then almost two decades after leaving Pakistan visiting Bangladesh for my fieldwork.

My own distance from Bangladesh – not only in terms of space and time but also religious, cultural, national and linguistic associations, in addition to having a researcher status in the country – makes me an "outsider." Since people are eager to tell their stories, to justify the ongoing war trials or to create witness in others, being a researcher from a

Canadian University has helped me with the gathering of interviews, navigating the archives at the war museum and crafting a research-creation project that has the potential of making contributions to the existing research on genocide with a feminist approach. However, the position of a foreign researcher in Bangladesh does not always guarantee trust. On numerous occasions during my fieldwork in Bangladesh, I was asked about my opinion on Sarmila Bose's research as a way to gauge my bias in this research. The officials at the Liberation War Museum and some university professors whom I met in Dhaka wanted to ensure that they were sharing their knowledge with someone whose interests were not contradictory to theirs, in other words, critical of the Bangladeshi government. The lack of trust was rooted in Sarmila Bose's book, *Dead Reckoning: Memories of the 1971 Bangladesh War*, which became controversial as she questioned the number of people killed in the war and challenged the genocidal nature of the conflict. One of my friends shared with me the following excerpt from Bose's work being circulated on a Pakistani Facebook community.



Translation:

Violence Against Women

While researching the war of 1971, I was informed by the Bengali people of the details of the war. I was amazed to see that despite my attempts, I did not find any evidence supporting the claim that the Pakistani army targeted women and children. After talking to the witnesses, I realized the extent of the propaganda against the Pakistani army in regards to violence against women to fuel the public sentiment.

Sarmila Bose, Indian Journalist

Figure 1: Sarmila Bose Quoted on Social Media

Bose's research seems to be abdicating the Pakistani army of genocidal crimes and mass killing. She writes, "There was only one 'invading force' in East Pakistan in 1971 – that was India" (163). In her book, Bose writes about the demonising of the Pakistani army by the Bengali pro-liberation forces through accusations of "monstrous actions regardless of evidence" (164). Noting five instances where the Pakistani army killed unarmed civilians, Bose writes, "There appears to be a clear pattern in these cases of the Pakistan army targeting adult men, while sparing women and children. Female casualties in these instances appear to have been unintentional, as in the cases of women caught in the crossfire" (164). Some may argue that a dispassionate account of the war is necessary to counter the official history, but an account like that, especially the one offered in Bose's work, seems to take a patriarchal perspective and views violence against women as a collateral damage in war. Bose's book has significantly impacted the sentiments of survivors and nationalists alike. Moreover, through her revisionist account of the war, Bose worsened the atmosphere of mistrust between Bangladesh and Pakistan and between researcher and researched, which became evident in my experiences of doing fieldwork. Even more testing were the times when my Pakistani birth blurred the insider/outsider divide and I was perceived as the enemy, or in the very least as representing them. My encounter with a survivor who lost her brother in the war of 1971 offered a sobering moment in my research. After a line of questioning that established my personal history, the interviewee demanded an apology from me for the war of 1971. In that moment, I was moved by the gravity of her suffering and said to her, "I am truly sorry for your loss," which could be interpreted as a condolence or an apology. In my research, therefore, I speak from the position of an insider who has obvious personal

history and vested interest in the region, and also as an outsider who has an academic interest in analysing the ways gender is implicated in genocide. In “Situating Locations: The Politics of Self, Identity, and “Other” in Living and Writing the Text,” Jayati Lal writes about the insider/outsider dilemma in feminist fieldwork. Lal’s experiences with the divide was in the context of her research in India, where the shared gender, language and cultural identity with the participants in her research gave her the insider status but it was not enough to overcome the class differences between herself and those participants which made her an outsider. The question of insider/outsider dynamic in feminist research is not new and has been used by transnational feminist scholars, such as Jayati Lal and Yasmin Saikia, as a space for positive intervention. Yasmin Saikia’s polyversal ethnographic research in *Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971* is also situated from the position of a South Asian scholar with undeniable connections to the region. Growing up in Assam, India, Saikia writes, “We became afraid that the Bangladeshi settlers would take over our land and turn us into a minority group in our homeland” (*Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh* 67). Saikia’s research in Bangladesh is rooted in her scholarly interest in the history of the region, but more importantly in the personal memories of her father and those around her. The potential of feminist research is not in denying either the position of an insider or the position of the outsider, but in actively constructing the two positions, which often requires stepping in and out instead of remaining still within the pre-conceived position occupied by the researcher, and creating a dialogic relationship between the two. In “Not You/Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference,” Trinh T. Minh-ha writes:

The moment the insider steps out from the inside she's no longer a mere insider. She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. Not quite the same, not quite the other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out. Undercutting the inside/outside opposition, her intervention is necessarily that of both not quite an insider and not quite an outsider. She is, in other words, this inappropriate other or same who moves about with always at least two gestures: that of affirming 'I am like you' while persisting in her difference and that of reminding 'I am different' while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at. (374-5)

In my research in Bangladesh, I maintained my researcher status and instead of denying my personal history I acknowledged it, I established the geographical and temporal distances from 1971 where there was a need or possibility, but most importantly I built alliances with the four women who participated in my research. By incorporating the voices and experiences of women from ethnic and religious minority groups and rape survivors who have been silenced or written off as excessive in the mainstream discourses on the 1971 genocide, my research makes room for collaboration and understanding between the researcher and the research participants. My insider/outsider status also helps me to imagine a viewer/reader of this cultural text as situated in one or more of the domains where I find myself in this research – in Bangladesh, in a Western context, and in the intellectual community. As an insider looking out and an outsider looking in, my research, in particular my essay film on Bangladesh, provides a moment of coming together to the research participants, the researcher and the viewers in the process of making meaning. The film offers a unique meeting point of my subjectivity, with those of the survivors and the viewers, and it seeks to create a space to communicate, challenge and resist the dominant discourse on genocide by building a coalition between the three subject positions.

The expression of subjectivity in the essay film is rooted in a place of vulnerability and demands the essayistic subject take risks, engage in self-reflexivity and find comfort in a self that is destabilized but better-suited to enter into a dialogic relationship with the viewers. In *Naristhan/Ladyland*, my subjectivity is expressed at the outset by establishing my familial connections to the story and also in scholarly texts employed throughout the film as moments of reflection. This destabilized self is not about transcendence, it is situated in a specific location with situated knowledge; it maintains the authorial voice of the filmmaker while trying to find connections with the viewer. It is able to construct and deconstruct ways of seeing, while also seeking perspective from different viewing positions. It is this articulation of the essay film, which allows multiplicity, and renders it the most ethical form of filmmaking.

Making *Naristhan/Ladyland* (2016)

Though the war of 1971 is part of my heritage, visiting Bangladesh for me was in many ways entering a foreign land. Prior to leaving for my fieldwork in 2013, I became familiar with Yasmin Saikia's research and in particular her book, *Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971*. After reading her book, I was able to have a Skype conversation with Prof. Saikia in which she shared her contacts in Bangladesh with me. The process of making the initial contact with some of the interviewees started while still in Canada. Upon clearance from the ethics committee of Concordia University², my first research trip to Bangladesh took place in December 2013 just days

² Considering the scope of my project in dealing with female survivors of genocide, Concordia University required ethics clearance to ensure the utmost clarity and care in carrying out the research and commitment to research participants. The ethics review

after Abdul Kader Mullah was executed for committing war crimes in 1971. Mullah was convicted of actively participating in the killing of 344 civilians, rape and other crimes. Many of the atrocities for which Mullah was convicted took place in Dhaka, in Mirpur Jallad Khana, earning him the name “Butcher of Mirpur” (Bangladesh War Trials, BBC). The killing site was excavated by the Liberation War Museum of Bangladesh in 1999 and they discovered 70 skulls and more than 5000 pieces of bones (Hoque 52). Mullah’s execution took place on 12 December 2013 and I arrived in Dhaka on 15 December 2013. After Mullah’s execution, the emotions were running high in the country, numerous people were killed in violent attacks and for several days the city of Dhaka was in a total shut down; it was considered unsafe for traveling. Upon arrival, Sanam Amin, the hired translator, helped locate the addresses of the individuals to whom Prof. Saikia had introduced me in an email. I was able to conduct some key interviews for this research, visited the Liberation War Museum a few times, and attended and filmed a protest, which was held in Dhaka to show support for the war trials. The protesters were marching towards the Pakistani Embassy and as a heavy presence of police and other armed forces tried to stop them several protesters including my interview subject Ferdousi Priyubhashini were attacked and injured by the police; Pakistani flags were also burned at the protest. It was undoubtedly one of the most tense situations I had to navigate in my fieldwork. I filmed as much as I could while also remaining safe, and left as the situation began to move out of control and the protesters clashed with the police.

process included: compliance with the research protocol (see Appendix 1A), a sample consent form (see Appendix 1B), and of sample questions to be asked during the interview (see Appendix 1C).

The war trials and the accompanying politics and protests made my meetings with survivors slightly more difficult by creating hurdles to traveling to the interview locations and, more importantly, creating a sense of controversy and additional sensitivity to talking about the war of 1971. I was unable to travel to Sirajganj to interview Shafina Lohani who started a shelter for rape survivors after 1971 and has played a key role in rehabilitating women impacted by the war. The political situation also did not allow me to travel to Rangpur to interview one of the two officially recognized female freedom fighters, Taramon Bibi. A vast majority of interviews were conducted in Dhaka. Even though, at times, my conversations with survivors started cautiously, as the interviews went on the survivors seemed more open and comfortable sharing their stories. During my meetings with survivors, I informed them about my research project, answered their questions about my work and my background and later on some of them introduced me to other individuals who they thought might be of interest to me. The interviews were semi-structured and recorded with the help of a filmmaker friend from Toronto, Igal Hecht, who was in Bangladesh for a separate project. The interview with Ferdousi Priyubhashini was conducted in Bengali language with the assistance of interpreter Sanam Amin and the rest were conducted either in English or Urdu. The excerpts that are reproduced in the text below are taken from the interviews which were structured and semi-structured, lasting from one to three and a half hours in duration. I visited some of the interviewees more than once to seek better understanding of their encounters with the war of 1971 and ask new questions that had emerged in my research. Ferdousi Priyubhashini, Saira Bano and Aroma Dutta are among those survivors.

My repeated visits to the Liberation War Museum allowed me the much needed time in the archives to understand the displays and the ideologies behind them. The museum through its exhibits, cultural and social events and public support for the government represents and amplifies the mainstream and “official” narrative about the war of 1971. One of the trustees of the museum, Mofidul Hoque, gave me permission to film inside the galleries and shared with me photographs and video archives of the war, with permission to use the audio/visual material in my research. The audio/visual material that I received from the museum became instrumental in my research in establishing the national discourse on the war. On 16 December 2013, to celebrate Bangladesh’s victory over Pakistan in the war of 1971, Bangladesh set a new world record for creating the largest human flag – a record previously held by Pakistan. 27,117 Bangladeshi students and members of armed forces held up red and green placards in Dhaka's National Parade Ground to create the Bangladeshi national flag. The event, though spectacular, also seemed a bit strange in a country with so much political turmoil and poverty. I arranged to purchase the aerial footage of the event from a local TV channel and spent the day filming the celebrations around the city and interviewing people. While filming on the streets of Dhaka on Victory Day, I decided to interview some members of the general population, including young men and women who were celebrating Bangladesh’s victory over Pakistan, some street children and women who appeared to be working on that day. The responses from the people who were celebrating the national holiday seemed in line with the nationalist narrative, but the working women had a different view on the significance of that day. I asked one woman, who was sweeping the streets, if the day meant something to her and she gave a simple one word

response, “no.” This sequence appears at the end of my film, suggesting the marginalization of women in the ideologies of nationalism due to their socio-economic status. Based on my interactions with women in Dhaka, it appears that the nationalist ideology is more widespread among the middle and upper echelons of the society but the lower, working-class women feel disenfranchised from nationalism as they did not particularly benefit from the nation’s independence, amplifying how intersectionalities implicate women in the imagined communities of the nation. Overall, despite the ongoing political crisis and tensions around the war trials, I found the people of Bangladesh welcoming and willing to share their stories. I returned to Montreal in January 2014 with all the material I had gathered for my research.

During my second research trip in January 2015, the opposition leader of Bangladesh, Khaleda Zia, called for an indefinite nationwide strike and arson attacks became daily news. For the first few days I heeded the advice of my generous host in Dhaka and avoided traveling in the city. Frustrated with not being able to conduct my research, one afternoon I decided to take my chances and visit the Liberation War Museum in the city centre. Stuck in Dhaka traffic, reading the news on my phone about the arson attacks and the dozens of people who were killed and injured within days, I feared for my safety. To work in that environment was challenging but I was able to interview survivors, activists and everyday people, and visited the memorial sites, NGO offices, refugee camps, workshops that resembled sweatshops, and homes of survivors. I also spent a considerable amount of time at the Liberation War Museum in Dhaka. Among some of the key events I was able to attend in 2015 were: play “Jamuna” based on the story of Ferdousi Priyubhashini; the International Mother Language Day on 21

February 2015; a conference organized by the Liberation War Museum in March 2015; and events to commemorate the start of the war of 1971 on 25 March 2015. My discussion in this research project draws on my experiences in Bangladesh and my research and creative work – interviews and other filmed events.

The process of compiling a “research-creation” project has been enlightening on many grounds. Going back and forth between video editing, researching, and writing, and then repeating the whole cycle has generally been the flow of my work on this project. This process has highlighted the significance of developing meaningful creative work in conjunction with academic research. To engage with theory while working with existing media that have been impregnated with so much meaning in cultural discourses and creating new media texts has been revealing of gender constructions and expressions in nationalism and during wartime. Reviewing all the archival material, stills, video and audio, and an attempt to authenticate them have not been an easy task. However, with the permission from the Liberation War Museum to incorporate this material into my research, I am able to re-create the preferred discourse of the nation, which is on display at the museum. Examining the archives, it becomes evident that women’s stories are appropriated, if not entirely silenced, for a nationalist agenda, and male voices and expressions of nationalism are given a preferred reading. The archives at the war museum actively construct gender and social relations in their displays. In this research, the instances of editing of the photographs and videos have been carefully selected to highlight the omissions in national memory and to offer a collection of interspersed representations and what they signify collectively. These moments of editing have been utilized in the film as a representation strategy and taking a reflexive approach, they have

been clearly marked in the film. The juxtaposition of the archival text and testimonies, through the use of split screen is implemented to underscore not only the tension that exists between nationalism and gender but more importantly the dialogic relationship between the two narratives of history. Trauma studies scholar and historian, Dominick LaCapra writes, “Dialogic relations are agonistic and non-authoritarian in that an argument is always subject to a response or counterargument; it may be answered or criticized in an ongoing give-and-take” (709). In this project, women by offering a counter-narrative to the nationalist account of the war of 1971 challenge the authority inscribed in nationalist institutions.

Finally, framing my subjectivity without turning this project into an autobiographical account has taken a considerable amount of time and reflection. At the refugee camps in Bangladesh, I sometimes found myself asking survivors who claimed to have worked for the railway during the time of the conflict if they knew my family. With the exception of some people in Saidpur, no one in Dhaka knew my grandfather or any other members of my family. In post-production, the interview of Saira Bano was the first one I processed and the reason was my familiarity with the language, the impact of her story and a sense of empathy for her. During the editing of the interview with Saira Bano, I had numerous conversations with my father. He told me that when my family moved to Pakistan in 1971, our neighbours, the native Pakistanis, blamed us for the hike in the price of eggs. This was an example of outsiders or refugees, as seen in the current political climate, being blamed for the existing economic problems in a country. When I reflect on that particular anecdote, combined with my childhood in Pakistan, and then my life in Canada, I am reminded of my status as an outsider. The framing of my subjectivity

in this essay film undoubtedly made me feel vulnerable and exposed. But the project is not merely personal. It is about challenging the appropriation and politicization of women's stories and making an intervention in the dominant account of history by documenting women's experiences in the war of 1971. However, the world of images has its restraints. This film attempts to direct the audiences' attention to what I, the filmmaker, have deemed important and guides their look, but much remains to be done in the way of interpretation, especially because my film is attempting to bring an "over there" for an audience "over here." To guide the viewer's reading of the film, I have used the voiceover.

The Status of Voiceover

In the film that accompanies this research project, I have chosen voiceover as a tool to foreground my subjectivity in first person and to help guide the interpretation work that accompanies a project like this. In the world of documentary filmmaking, voiceover is often employed to fill in the gaps left by the interviews and video footage and to guide the viewing of the film. But in documentary film theory, as Laura Rascaroli writes in "Sonic Interstices," documentary voiceover has been described as "inhabiting an extra-diegetic space, from which it comments on the diegesis, thus controlling the spectator's reading of the film and imposing unequivocal meanings that distort the indexical truthfulness of the images and the authenticity of the witnesses' words" (1). Even though the extra-diegetic space claimed by voiceover is considered authoritarian by some, it is essentially the "authoring" aspect of the voiceover that guides the spectator's reading of the film. Voiceover foregrounds the filmmaker's subjectivity and makes it a

useful tool for an essay film. The voiceover in this project is not entirely outside of the diegesis. As the director and enunciator of the essay, I overtly say “I” in this film to highlight my proximity and connection to this work. Voiceover in this project, by foregrounding subjectivity, problematizes the notion of objectivity and truth in documentary film. The voiceover narration employed in this project situates me as a woman with complex ties to the region’s history, as a filmmaker and as a researcher. Stating at the outset the ways I am implicated in this project, I seek to communicate my subjectivity, which is problematic and unstable, in order to build an alliance with the subjects of the film and with the viewers. The consciousness of this film expressed in such a way demands the viewer to build coalition with the filmmaker instead of forcing a point of view on them. The use of voiceover between the interviews helps to emphasize my reading of the function performed by the testimonies. The voiceover in this project also directs the viewers’ attention to the omissions and appropriation in the national memory. The war of 1971 officially ended on 16 December 1971 and in that war women suffered great losses. In the process of writing national history, women found themselves doubly marginalized and pushed to the periphery. The archival footage, women’s testimonies and the voiceover in the film seek to communicate that. The reflexive approach taken in this film attempts to make an intervention in the existing discourses on gendered experiences of genocide, which is currently inundated by the nationalist patriarchal memory of the war and a universalized victimhood stance taken by some feminists.

As a research-creation project, the film has played an essential role for this research to emerge. The film informs the written component of this doctoral thesis and in

return is influenced by the written component. The theoretical framework in the written thesis provides the building blocks for this film and helps to clearly define the various questions and issues that arise through the testimonies. The feminist theoretical concept of intersectionality, for instance, allows us to situate gendered experiences in Bangladesh at the intersection of ethnicity, religion and class. The testimonies in the film articulate nationalism, gender and history-writing in South Asia, some of the key theoretical concepts explored in this research. It is through the various juxtapositions implemented in the film that a more complete picture of the relationship between gender and nationalism comes to surface. It is through the film that the existing narrative on the war of 1971 is challenged and a counter narrative is offered. *Naristhan/Ladyland* emphasizes the diversity of women's experiences in war. In war, not every woman is raped, not every woman actively chooses to fight the enemy, and not every woman becomes a refugee. Women experience war from various vantage points depending on their belonging and identity in society. To force universalization on women's experiences in war in the name of nation is the work of the dominant culture, which must be resisted and challenged because it denies women the reality of their lived experiences. Research-creation offers a tremendous potential to make an intervention in the existing regimes of truth and create an account of history which is inclusive of women's varying experiences in war and makes the consumer of the images in an archive think critically about the ideologies that are also on display but are not always easy to discern. This research-creation project takes the form of an essay film and instead of claiming universality or objectivity, puts the emphasis on subjectivity. The four women featured in this project challenge the hegemonic reading of the 1971 war.

Chapter 7

STORIES OF RESISTANCE

**Aroma Dutta, Pratiti Devi Ghatak, Saira Bano, Ferdousi Priyubhashini, and
Sultana Kamal**

Naristhan/Ladyland relies on the memories of survivors to create a shift in the dominant narratives of history. Creating a film on the war of 1971 brings out of the oblivion the stories that were once considered excessive and uncomfortable by nationalist forces. The deficiencies observed in the national narrative – the silencing, appropriating, and forgetting of women’s experiences – warrants this kind of intervention in the writing of history. To create a film in addition to a written thesis performs the function of multiplying the available interpretations of history and challenges the national forgetting. The written thesis attempts to bridge the oral history collected in the form of filmed interviews with written history. In the following section, I analyze the testimonies of four survivors to highlight the connection between violence endured by women in the war of 1971 and the violence done in the historical narrative. I also include the photographs of the interviewees to challenge the forced anonymity on women’s suffering. This research relies on the memories of women from the 1971 genocide in Bangladesh, but the aim is not to reconstruct some historical truth; it is to challenge the existing regimes of truth by highlighting the processes through which some memories are considered extraneous. In *The Drowned and the Saved*, Primo Levi writes that the injury of war cannot be healed and it transcends time and continues to haunt the tormentor and the tormented. To understand the injury means to simplify, “without profound simplification the world

around us would be an infinite, undefined tangle that would defy our ability to orient ourselves and decide upon our actions” (36). While it is essential to decide upon our actions, to simplify history is not desirable. History is simplified to orient individuals towards a nationalist cause and what is knowable is significantly reduced. While the national memory of the war constructed through the Liberation War Museum seeks to represent the “us” versus “them” divide, Bengalis versus Pakistanis, the war was experienced by women in much more complex ways. Gendered experience of war is the thread that runs through the four testimonies in this research. Examining gendered experiences of war can help us understand the complex social relationships that construct gender in the first place and lead to the gendered experiences of war which are situated at the intersection of religion, ethnicity and class. Gender as an organizing principle also finds room for expression in cultural representations at the war museum, which through cultural symbols and their interpretations reproduces gender in its displays.

Gender in Bangladesh is not a homogenous or unified category. Gender as a social construct creates social subjects whose experiences vary based on their belonging to different identity groups. The specificity of the experiences of the women interviewed in this research is an attempt to resist the simplification of historical discourses along the lines of victims and perpetrators. It emphasizes the refusal of the women who survived the war to be put into simplified categories. In so doing, the women in this project not only testify to the atrocities committed in the war of 1971, but they also testify to the violence endured in the writing of history. The women offer a counter discourse to the national memory of the war of 1971.

Pratiti Devi Ghatak and Aroma Dutta



Figure 2: Pratiti Devi Ghatak



Figure 3: Aroma Dutta

The Daughters of the Soil³

Pratiti Devi Ghatak and Aroma Dutta come from a prominent political and cultural Hindu family in South Asia. Aroma Dutta, daughter of Pratiti Devi, roughly 60 years old, runs a non-governmental organization to train women to achieve employment and self-sustainability. Working in a highly politicized and increasingly religious environment, Dutta has a complex relationship with present day Bangladesh.

Ghatak, once a renowned singer, is now in her 80s and remembers the partition of India in 1947 and the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. The partition of India divided Ghatak's family, as some members of her family migrated to Calcutta, India and others remained in Dhaka, East Pakistan. Her brothers, Ritwik Ghatak, an acclaimed filmmaker, and Manik Ghatak, a Bengali poet and novelist were among some of the family members to leave Dhaka. Mahasweta Devi is Manik Ghatak's daughter and an influential postcolonial feminist writer whose work has been translated from Bengali to English by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The three short stories featured in Mahasweta Devi's *Imaginary Maps* – "The Hunt," "Douloti the Bountiful", and "Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirth" – are stories of women in tribal India haunted by the region's colonial history, or as Spivak calls them "gendered subaltern subjects" (1993). Spivak writes, "Mahasweta invites us to realize that, in the context of this fiction, for the subaltern, and especially the subaltern woman, 'Empire' and 'Nation' are interchangeable names" (Woman in Difference 1993). For subaltern gendered subjects, the empire-nation reversal means the substitution of one system of difference for another as the political goals of the old colony are carried forward by the new nation. Postcoloniality and regional history are

³ Interview transcript in Appendix 2A

privileged in Mahasweta Devi's work. Consider, for instance, "Draupadi." In 1971, the freedom fighters of East Pakistan made an alliance with the Naxalites of West Bengal in India. The Naxalites were peasants from the Naxalbari area of West Bengal. The movement highlighted collaboration between peasants and intellectuals to end the oppression of landless peasants. Spivak notes that India's intervention in the war of 1971 was partly to discourage East Pakistan's guerrilla style insurgency to take root in the Naxalite movement in India (Draupadi 386). The setting for Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi" is the Naxalite movement in India and the war of 1971. The anxieties of colonization and partition are difficult to escape for Pratiti Devi Ghatak and her family because of their strong involvement in political and intellectual movements in South Asia. Aroma Dutta recalls in her testimony that her grandfather Dhirendranath Dutta, who was a renowned Congressman from East Bengal (now Bangladesh), was against the partition of India. At the time of the partition, he was offered the position of the first Chief Minister of West Bengal, which meant opting for India instead of Pakistan, but more importantly it would mean leaving his home in Comilla. He declined the offer by saying, "No, that's not where I belong. I belong to this soil." Connections to the land can inspire nationalism in groups of people. Even though nationalism at the time of the 1947 partition was defined along the lines of religion, Hindu and Muslim, the Bengali nationalism that took roots after 1947 was more strongly connected with land rather than with religion. The connection to the land and language is what Aroma Dutta articulates in her testimony. Dhirendranath Dutta asserted his belonging to the land and played a crucial role in the politics of East Pakistan. He started what is now commonly remembered as the Language Movement.

Language is more than a basic instrument of communication – it depicts cultural, social and political relationships. Coded in language are markers of boundaries, culture and affiliation that seek continuity of existing narratives. In *Nations and Nationalism*, Ernest Gellner defines nationalism “as the striving to make culture and polity congruent, to endow a culture with its own political roof, and not more than one roof at that” (43). Within the nationalist struggle, a difference in culture is articulated through a difference in language, which fans nationalist sentiments and acts as a moment of closure. In the articulation of India and Pakistan as two separate nations, Hindi and Urdu were articulated as distinct national languages. However, A. Aneesh’s research shows the two languages originate from the same dialect and their separate histories and institutionalization do not stretch far beyond the beginning of the British colonization of the region. The languages, according to Aneesh, “share common grammar at large, including common pronouns, verbs, and basic vocabulary, and speakers of both languages can follow each other; it is only their literary forms that have become mutually unintelligible because of the strong influences of Sanskrit on Hindi and of Persian and Arabic on Urdu” (94). Aneesh notes that the first instance of distinction which was recorded by the British colonizers was in 1824 when Captain Price used the word “Hindee” for “Hindi” and “Hindoostanee” for “Urdu” (94). As the independence movement began in India in the second half of the nineteenth century, the leaders felt the need to have a language that would perform the function of not only creating a unified nation but also to communicate and fulfill the growing national aspirations and sentiments. In general, the Hindi language became associated with Hindu nationalism and Urdu became associated with Muslim nationalism. Overall, religion and not language

proved to be a stronger marker of difference in the 1947 partition of India. The Muslim separatists, however, belonged to different regional cultures, and no place else was this difference more evident than in the region of Bengal where Bengali Muslims had more in common in terms of a shared Bengali culture with Bengali Hindus than with Urdu-speaking Muslims of India. The nationalist sentiment created some anxieties among the Bengali population as the borders were being negotiated between the interested parties, but at the time of the partition the question of language remained unanswered for the Bengali Muslims.

The Bengali Language Movement started in East Pakistan soon after the partition of 1947 with cultural and political activists and leaders demanding that Bengali should be the state language. On 25 February 1948, Dhirendranath Dutta, a member of parliament, delivered an impassioned address at the national assembly, pointing out that Bengali and not Urdu was the language of the majority of Pakistanis, but the state language being Urdu and not Bengali posed real practical problems to people.

Sir, in the Eastern Pakistan where the people numbering four crores and forty lakhs speak the Bengali language the common man even if he goes to a Post Office and wants to have a money order form finds that the money order is printed in Urdu language and is not printed in Bengali language or it is printed in English. ... The value of the Stamp, Sir, is written not in Bengali but is written Urdu and English. But he can't say, Sir, whether he has got the real value of the Stamp. These are the difficulties experienced by the common man of the State. The language of the State should be such which can be understood by the common man of the State. (Manik, Web)

The speech was met with resistance by the President and Prime Minister of Pakistan who emphasized that it was religion that united the country and since Urdu was the most Islamic language of India (N. Bose n.p.), it would remain the national language of the

new country. This despite the fact that only 10 per cent of the entire country's population had any knowledge of Urdu language and the majority spoke Bengali (Mascarenhas 16). Those who insisted on Bengali to be a language of the state were seen as foreign conspiratorial elements. Aroma Dutta in her testimony recalls that the country's Prime Minister at the time rebuked Mr. Dutta for raising the question of the Bengali language and told him, "Mr. Dutta, you are trying to break Pakistan. And for that we will not spare you." In *Nationalism and the Imagination*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has argued that language plays an important role in exertion of control by the state because language teaches individuals how to negotiate the public and private divide. Language is also a tool to pass down stories through traditional oral storytelling or more developed forms of expression, cementing the idea of a collectivity. It is no surprise then that the Urdu-speaking government of Pakistan, sought to ban many Bengali poets and authors, despite Bengali being the most commonly spoken language in East Pakistan. The rising tensions in East Pakistan were exacerbated by the influx of Urdu-speaking migrants, or Biharis, from India and resulted in sporadic protests and violence. On 20 February 1952, the government passed a law banning processions and public meetings and a day later the students defied the official ban and held a peaceful demonstration in Dhaka, demanding Bengali to be the state language. The police opened fire, killing many students. 21 February 1952 marked the beginning of a language movement that sought to counter the cultural domination by West Pakistan. Finally, in 1954, the government of Pakistan recognized Bengali as an official state language. However, that did not solve the problem of economic exploitation at the hands of the national government and a lack of political representation of Bengalis in national politics. In the 1960s many Bengali politicians,

including Dhirendranath Dutta, were barred from participating in politics and put under house arrest. After 1965, Dutta returned to his law practice in Comilla, Bangladesh and refrained from politics. Three days after the war was started in 1971, Dutta and one of his sons were picked up by the Pakistani army, tortured and killed. Noting her grandfather's influence on regional politics, Aroma Dutta says, "we heard that Mrs. Gandhi had made a condolence in the parliament, in Lok Sabha, on behalf of my grandfather; said that he was picked up and martyred. And because he was a renowned national politician, so a minute condolence, you know, silence was observed." The bodies of Dhirendranath Dutta and his son were never recovered. After the war ended, the Bangladeshi government confiscated the land and property owned by Hindus, without compensation and notice, under the Enemy Property Act, continuing the discriminatory laws from the previous Pakistani government. Aroma Dutta comments, "this is how our refugee life started and we lost, we lost everything – our identity, our existence." For Aroma Dutta and her mother, the struggle after the war was the loss of her grandfather, their livelihood and their identity.

While Aroma Dutta clearly remembers the events leading up to 1971, Dhirendranath Dutta's contribution to the war of liberation is not remembered with the same amount of detail or reverence by the country's war museum. History in South Asia is written and reproduced along the divisive line of Hindu and Muslim and that is the narrative on display at the war museum.



Figure 4: Gallery II, Liberation War Museum, Dhaka

In one of the six galleries at the Liberation War Museum of Bangladesh, the Language Movement is on display. Gallery II (figure 4) is a testament to the national pride in Bengali identity in the years preceding the war. Pictures and newspaper clippings seek to demonstrate the struggle of the people for the adoption of Bengali as a state language. In one of the displays, Dhirendranath Dutta's demand to make Bangla one of the official languages of the country is summarized (figure 5) without the actual content of his speech, which had emphasized the real need of the common man to be able to speak his or her own mother tongue in order to navigate the public and private spheres of their lives and the political need to unite the country despite religious differences. Also on display is a group photograph of Dhirendranath Dutta without his name, making it impossible to connect the face to the name. Mr. Dutta's long history of political activism

in the country's nationalist movement is downplayed in the displays at the war museum.

Also missing from the display is any mention of the brutal killing of Mr. Dutta by the Pakistani army in 1971.

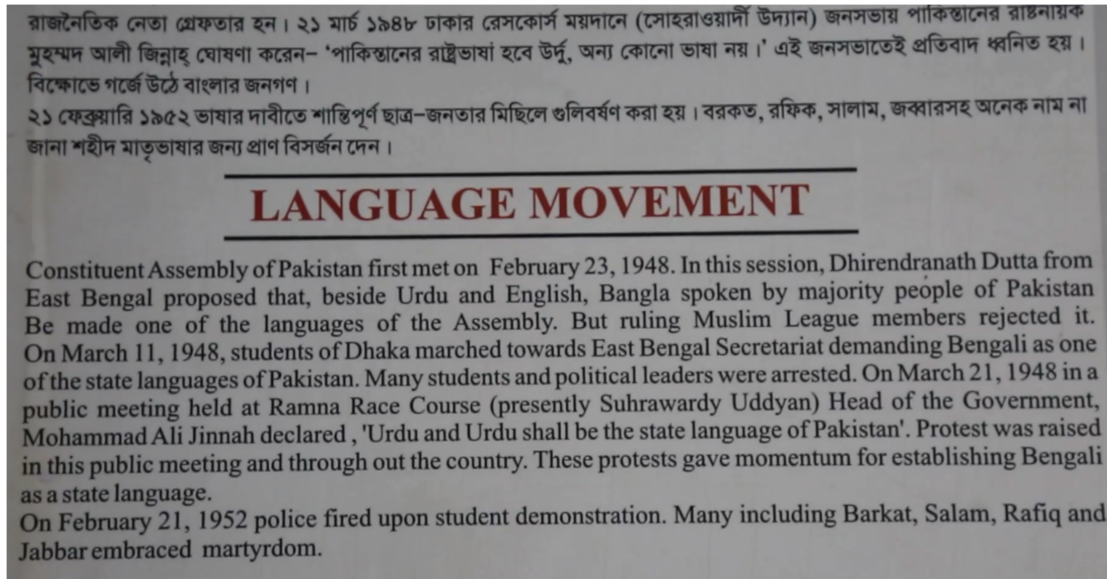


Figure 5: Gallery II, Liberation War Museum, Dhaka



Figure 6: Gallery II, Liberation War Museum, Dhaka

In an attempt to challenge the national forgetting and to remind the country of Dhirendranath Dutta's contribution to the war of liberation, Aroma Dutta's daughter and Dhirendranath Dutta's great-granddaughter, Esha Aurora who is a Dhaka-based journalist, wrote an opinion piece for Bangladesh's *The Daily Star* on 27 March 2015.

On Independence Day newspapers and television channels run all kinds of stories and biographies on people who galvanised the cause for our independence from Pakistan, but I stopped looking for the slightest mention of my great grandfather a long time ago. It seems that if you are Hindu then your story counts a lot less, even if that person was the first person to ever bring up the subject of Bangla being the lingua franca of then East Pakistan. (Aurora, "Dhirendranath Dutta")

Aroma Dutta and Pratiti Devi do not openly discuss their views on the omission in the national memory, but in March 2015, on the anniversary of the Liberation War, Aroma Dutta spent some off-camera quiet time with me and one of her friends, remembering her grandfather and recited a poem, *Eyeless in the Urn*, written by her father Sanjib Dutta (see Appendix 3A) to eulogize Dhirendranath Dutta's death. The trauma and pain for this family does not find recognition and expression in public space. While the national memory may seem to suffer from collective forgetting, the house where I interviewed Devi and Dutta resembles a museum where personal archives seek to fill in what is omitted from the national memory. On display are numerous pictures of Mr. Dutta spanning his political career. Esha Aurora writes, "In my house you couldn't escape the ghost of him even if you tried" (Aurora, "Dhirendranath Dutta"). The trauma experienced by Aroma Dutta has seemingly been transmitted unconsciously to her daughter as a result of her surroundings – at home and in public forums. Aurora, in turn, appears to be able to use her position as a journalist and attempts to repair the post-war experiences of her

family, specifically the national forgetting. A vast amount of research on intergenerational trauma has been conducted (for example, Laub & Auerhahn, 1989; Fearon, 2004; Pines, 1989) on children of Holocaust survivors, however without an in-depth interview with Aurora, an analysis of her trauma is unfortunately not possible. Her editorial in the newspaper does hint at the persecution that the Hindu community in Bangladesh is currently facing.

In her testimony, Aroma Dutta comments, “I am a warrior.” For Dutta, the war of 1971 has not finished; it has taken a different form. The war being fought in the country at the moment seems to be targeting Hindus and other secular elements of the society. At the time of partition in 1947, it is estimated that Hindus comprised roughly 30 per cent of the total population. During the war of 1971, as Nayanika Mookherjee notes in *The absent piece of skin: Gendered, racialized and territorial inscriptions of sexual violence during the Bangladesh war*, Hindus were specifically targeted. Mookherjee writes:

... the Pakistani army confirmed they were Muslims by inspecting whether they were circumcised. As mentioned earlier, this was an attempt to reconfirm the Muslim identity of the ‘Hinduized’ Bengali Muslims physically and seek the unity of East and West Pakistan based on religious unity. People would be asked to get out of public transport at checkpoints, show their ‘*danti*’ (identity) cards, undo their *lungis* (a sarong like cloth worn by poor men most of the time and by richer men within their homes) or trousers and were then checked by the roadside. If anyone was found to be non-circumcised, they were deemed to be Hindus and would be killed. (1586-7)

Many Hindus left for India as a result of the 1971 war and by 1974 the Hindu population had declined to 14%. In 2011, it was estimated that the Hindu population was only 9.6% of the total population of Bangladesh (Trivedi, n.pag.). Among the reasons behind the declining number of Hindus in Bangladesh the most notable are the rise of

religious fundamentalism and a campaign of fear mongering by their Muslims neighbours to grab their property. The last election in Bangladesh saw a widespread attack on Hindu minorities in many parts of the country. Their houses and shrines were looted and set ablaze and there were reports of rape. In one of the villages where the population of Hindus was 1200-1500 people, about 700 left immediately after an attack in 2014 (“Hindus Under Threat”). It is also reported that a Hindu freedom fighter’s house was attacked (Allchin, “The Hindus of Bangladesh Fear for Their Future”). In light of the current political reality of Hindus in Bangladesh, we are forced to see Aroma Dutta as a warrior who is not only trying to preserve the memory of her grandfather but also to survive.

Saira Bano



Figure 7: Saira Bano

The Unnamed and Uncounted Refugee⁴

At the time of the 1947 partition of India, around a million Urdu-speaking Muslims from the Indian state of Bihar migrated to what became East Pakistan. Their language tied them to the government, which was located in West Pakistan. In the years preceding the war, they were seen as unfairly advantaged and favoured by the government. During the war of 1971, a number of Biharis, loyal to their nation-state, collaborated with the Pakistani army; some created their own militia and participated in mass killing, rape and looting. However, as Yasmin Saikia notes, most Biharis who got caught up in the conflict zones suffered. Saikia writes, “At the end of the struggle, almost everyone in the zone of conflict had witnessed unspeakable horror and crimes in the name of nationalism” (Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh 149). After the war, for a majority of Bangladeshis, the entire Bihari community came to be perceived as enemy and traitors. Many Biharis were killed and much of their property was seized and those who survived were forced to seek refuge in camps set up by the International Committee for Red Cross (ICRC) in 1972 and were labeled as “Stranded Pakistanis.” The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Dhaka played a key role in relief efforts on the grounds. The agency was instrumental in repatriation efforts between 1973-74, mediating an agreement between the concerned nation-states and organizing an airlift of hundreds of thousands of displaced people between Bangladesh and Pakistan. According to the UNHCR, more than 170,000 Biharis moved to Pakistan under the 1974 Tripartite Agreement between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh; 9,900 between 1977-79; 4,800 in 1982; and in 1993, 53 Bihari families were accepted by

⁴ Interview transcript in Appendix 2B

Pakistan (Rupture in South Asia 74). The process came to a complete halt in the 1990s as the government of Pakistan saw the arrival of Biharis as exacerbating the ethnic tension in the country. The Bihari refugees were discriminated against not only by the ruling Punjabi elites, the Sindhi and Pathan factions of the society, but also by those who had migrated to Pakistan after the partition and before the war of 1971. Today, there are approximately 160,000 members of the Bihari/Urdu-speaking community who live in 116 refugee camps across the country (Sholder 1). Saira Bano lives in the Central Relief Organization (CRO) camp in Dhaka, set up in the aftermath of the 1971 war to house the internally displaced people who were to be repatriated to Pakistan.



Figure 8: The CRO Camp Building

The CRO camp is in an abandoned building with less than 300 residents, much smaller in size compared to Camp Geneva, which resembles a city slum with over 25,000 people residing in it. The living conditions inside the camp seem challenging. The camp has a crumbling infrastructure, unclean water, scant garbage pick-up, communal toilets,

footpaths that are often broken, staircase that appears to be deteriorating and roofs that are collapsing.



Figure 9: The CRO Camp Exterior



Figure 10: The CRO Camp Interior



Figure 11: Residents of the CRO Camp



Figure 12: The woman living in this room showed me her roof which collapsed some months ago and killed her granddaughter.

At the refugee camps in Dhaka, I met women who had their own stories and their own versions of history to share with me. In most of my conversations, women and teenagers talked about the 1971 war as a conflict between Biharis and Bengalis, and in their stories Bengalis were usually the oppressors. One woman recalled seeing her entire family being taken away and slaughtered by Bengalis and herself being rescued by a family servant who happened to be a Bengali man. Like Saira Bano, she spoke of her experiences in the war in a few words and with a sense of detachment. The emotional expression in her testimony became evident only as she talked about her fears today – economic, personal safety and political reprisal in the wake of war trials. Another woman talked about her family that was well-off before the war started, their religious and cultural beliefs, and being attacked by Bengalis during the war. She was 20 years old at the time and witnessed all her male family members getting killed by Bengali militia, Mukti Bahini. However, during the course of the interview our conversation took a strange turn as she decided to take her newborn granddaughter and pose with her in front of the camera. Her daughter-in-law, who also lived in the camp, after giving birth to twins, a boy and a girl, passed away due to medical complications and lack of access to healthcare. She told me that she hoped as a result of the interview someone living in Canada would see her granddaughter and adopt her. Gender selection was staring me in the face. But with her own health concerns and recently widowed, grieving and out-of-work son, she knew she could not take care of both her grandchildren and knowing the reality of gender in Bangladesh, she chose to give the girl up for adoption. I knew this was her reality and I had to suspend my judgement. Through talking to Saira Bano, I was able to see the trauma of the 1971 war endured by Bihari women and the inaccessibility

of their memory of the war. Bano, originally from Calcutta, remembers going to Dhaka as a child, but does not remember her exact age, her life before the war and what she saw during the war. She says, “I don’t have much memory of that.”

There has been tremendous research on trauma among survivors of genocide and other personal and collective catastrophic events. From Saira Bano’s testimony, it appears that her trauma is not simply located in the war of 1971. Bano’s trauma seems more centered on her experiences after the war than what she witnessed during the war. This particular kind of remembering depicts her relationship to the violence that was committed during the war, the denial of her suffering which became commonplace in the post-war remembering, and her complex relationships with the society at large. The denial of suffering of the Urdu-speaking Biharis of Bangladesh has resulted in a mourning that is impossible. Mourning, according to LaCapra, brings the possibility of engaging trauma in order for life to begin again (713). LaCapra notes, “When mourning turns to absence and absence is conflated with loss, then mourning becomes impossible, endless, quasi- transcendental grieving, scarcely distinguishable (if at all) from interminable melancholy” (716). Bano suffered personal losses in 1971, but her story is considered insignificant because of her identity as an Urdu-speaking Bihari woman. Without an opportunity to share her haunting story and mourn for her loss, Bano’s trauma remains unengaged and she is unable to work through it. The trauma for Bano continues in her present life. As Cathy Caruth writes in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, “trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it is precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on” (4).

Bano remembers coming to the refugee camp as a young woman after her husband was killed in the war, but does not recall any of the specifics. The inaccessibility of the occurrence of her trauma shows that the event itself has not been integrated into her consciousness. For Bano, her trauma shows itself in the aftermath of the war, living in the camp, losing her family, and working hard to earn a modest living. She says,

Do you know, I fetch five pots of water per house? Five pots or four. From morning till midnight. My whole body shivers. My body shivers, but I still fetch water. I really like the CRO (refugee camp). They tell me not to fetch water. We will provide for you (audibly getting emotional). But I don't listen to anyone. They all try to stop me. Everyone at the CRO camp. They say, we will give you food, clothes, money, everything. I don't listen to them. If I have to fetch water, then I will fetch water. Fetching water has bruised my hands. Look at my arms (Stretches out her arm and shows her bruises).

In some ways, Bano's trauma becomes visible only in the physical bruises on her body from fetching water that she displays during the interview. Several times in her testimony, Bano hints at deep despair and her perception of the worthlessness of her story. She says, "I don't tell anyone, what's the point." Cathy Caruth writes, "trauma is never simply one's own" (24). Saira Bano's relationship to her trauma needs to be examined in relation to the persecution faced by Biharis living in Bangladesh – restricted to live in the refugee camps without citizenship until 2008 and widespread discrimination at school and workplace – and the place their suffering occupies in the national memory. In the national memory, which finds expression at the Liberation War Museum of Dhaka, the trauma of the war, including displacement, rape and massacre, is considered an exclusively Bengali experience, as evidenced by the exhibits at the war museum. Yasmin Saikia also notes in her research that the internal, private stories, which deflect from the

national narratives on the war of 1971, have been subjected to a general erasure and nowhere is that erasure more obvious than in the Liberation War Museum's display of the refugee crisis.

The war museum has images of refugees on display, but these are Bengali refugees who fled East Pakistan during the war. According to the UNHCR, by the end of 1971, 10 million refugees had left Bangladesh for India (Rupture in South Asia 61). Anthony Mascarenhas writes about the severe food shortages in many parts of East Pakistan due to the cyclone that hit the region in November 1970, and which was exacerbated when the war started. The Pakistani government implemented a policy to use food as a tool to control people. Additionally, to stop the Pakistani army, Bangladeshi freedom fighters had also burned down roads and bridges, making it difficult to transport food to many parts of Bangladesh. The food shortages from the cyclone coupled with the mass killing, rape and destruction by the Pakistan army made the escape necessary for many people. Mascarenhas writes,

Evidence that the famine is already a reality is provided by the emaciated bodies of men, women and children – some just human bags of skin and bone – painfully making their way across the border into India. The first two waves of refugees were destitute and diseased, but did not have their bodies as worn down as those now crossing the border (130).

The description of the food shortage and the plight of the refugees provided by Mascarenhas bears eerie resemblance to the photograph of an anonymous refugee on display at the war museum of Bangladesh.

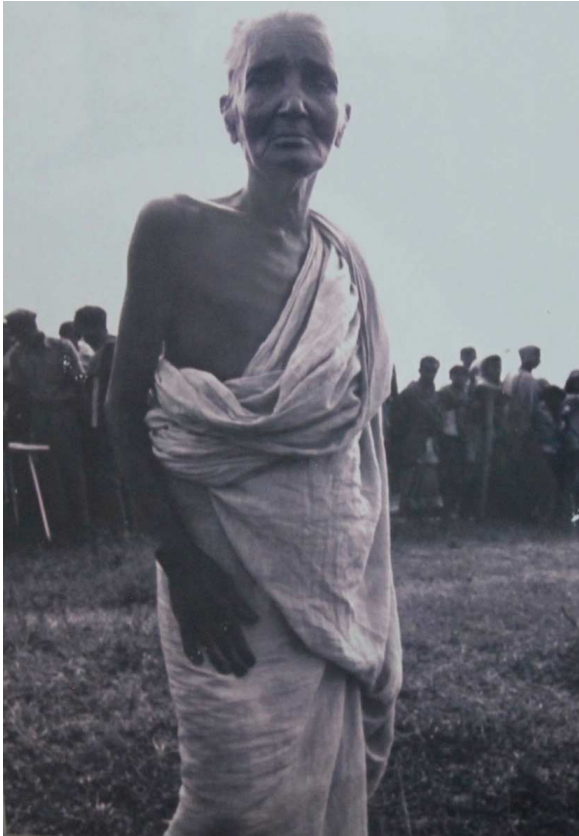


Figure 13: “Refugee”
Courtesy: Liberation War Museum, Dhaka

There are no names or any other markers of identification on the picture, making it clear that it is not about the woman in the photograph but about the calamity that she has gone through as a result of the war. The woman, her struggles and her trauma take a secondary place in the narrative of nationalism. The story of the nameless refugee remains symbolic of the omissions in the national memory. It shows a partial truth about the war.

Furthermore, the images of refugees on display at the war museum seek to erase any memory of the Bihari refugees who have been living in refugee camps for over four decades. Because of this omission in the national memory, Saira Bano personifies the nameless and unidentified refugee woman of today’s Bangladesh.

Ferdousi Priyubhashini



Figure 14: Ferdousi Priyubhashini

The *Birangana*⁵

Women are raped in all armed conflicts and by men from all sides. In “Rape and Sexual Abuse of Women in International Law,” Christine Chinkin writes that wartime rape is a question of power and control. For men, raping a woman is akin to humiliating her community. Chinkin writes,

Complex, combined emotions of hatred, superiority, vengeance for real or imagined past wrongs and national pride are engendered and deliberately manipulated in armed conflict. They are given expression through rape of the other side’s women. For the men of the community rape encapsulates the totality of their defeat; they have failed to protect ‘their’ women. (328)

In an article in the *Colloquium on Accountability of Sexual Violence Crimes and Experiences of the International Tribunals*, published by the Liberation War Museum, Laurel Fletcher writes that over 200,000 Bangladeshi women were raped by Pakistani soldiers, which resulted in approximately 25,000 pregnancies (9). The essence of this particular atrocity is captured through a newspaper article, written by Jill Tweedie for the UK-based publication *The Guardian*, published on March 6, 1972, and on display at the war museum.



Figure 15: Newspaper clipping framed on the wall of the Liberation War Museum

⁵ Interview transcript in Appendix 2C

The headline “The Rape of Bangladesh” captivates the viewer’s attention, however the paper clipping itself is torn out, which makes the content of the article appear unimportant and draws the attention away from it. The article is in the public domain and can be accessed in other archives and texts that exist on the topic of women and war. The headline of the article seemingly borrows from journalist Anthony Mascarenhas’ book, *The Rape of Bangla Desh*, published in October in 1971, while the war was still ongoing. In his book, Mascarenhas provides eyewitness accounts and a political and historical context to the war, without actually talking about the rape of Bangladeshi women. Mascarenhas writes that the confrontation between Pakistan’s army and the people of East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, was inevitable, as the government, located in West Pakistan, was unwilling to transfer power to the newly elected majority government in East Pakistan and that confrontation would explain “the subsequent rape of Bangla Desh” (58). Written in a journalistic, factual and dispassionate manner, Mascarenhas’ book provides accounts of various massacres of thousands of students, teachers and unarmed civilians (113-114)

During my sojourn with the army in Comilla area I was to see at first hand the screaming terror of the “kill and burn missions” as Hindus and other target types were systematically hunted from village to village and house to house. I saw whole villages devastated in reprisal for damaging a bridge. I saw the death sentence given with amazing casualty by a local martial law administrator – the flick of a pencil and another victim is marked “for disposal.” And in the army mess at night I heard the otherwise honorable men, “good chaps,” joking about the day’s kill and with a friendly rivalry, keeping track on the top score. I reported all this in the *Sunday Times* on 13 June 1971. ... There is also general knowledge of the unspeakable cruelties visited on thousands of defenseless men, women and children in the violent upsurge of the East Bengalis that followed the

campaign of genocide launched by the Pakistan army on 25 March 1971. These horrifying acts – killings, rape and the mutilation of women and children – are understandably an embarrassment to the sensitive people of Bangla Desh now locked in the battle for the homeland. (117-118)

Nowhere else in the book does Mascarenhas mention women or the campaign of mass rape implemented by the Pakistani army. Jill Tweedie's article, published months after the war was officially over, deals with rape as a war crime and highlights the gravity of the situation for rape survivors. Tweedie writes about the ambivalence with which the rape survivors of Bangladesh were treated – on the one hand as war heroines and on the other as disgraced women. The book title, "The Rape of Bangla Desh" and subsequently the headline of the article serve as an important example of the articulation of gender and nationalism in Bangladesh. In both instances, Bangladeshi women are used as a metaphor for national identity and the rape of Bangladeshi women is articulated as the rape of the nation. In her influential book on sexual violence against women, American feminist Susan Brownmiller argues that the crime of rape is rooted in the concept of male ownership in a patriarchal society. Brownmiller writes, "Concepts of hierarchy, slavery and private property flowed from, and could only be predicated upon, the initial subjugation of woman" (17). Since defense of women is a hallmark of male pride, rape by a conquering soldier destroys all illusion of power and property for men of the defeated side (Brownmiller 38). Therefore, historically, rape has been used as a weapon of war as also seen in the 1971 genocide in Bangladesh.

Ferdousi Priyubhashini is a 60-year-old artist and rape survivor from Bangladesh. Priyubhashini sometimes refers to herself as a victim and at other times as a survivor. As Elora Halim Chowdhury writes in *Transnationalism Reversed: Women Organizing*

Against Gendered Violence in Bangladesh, limiting a woman's story as a tale of either survival or victimhood is rather restrictive.

Chowdhury argues that these constructs govern the ways women are asked to structure their experiences and they hold women hostage to hegemonic categories of reference regarding violence: "She is victim to *it* or survivor of *it*" (Tami Spry qtd by Chowdhury 87). These forced categories deny women their agency in narrating their story. Priyubhashini's story is complex. It is at the same time a story of victimization and survival, oppression and resilience. While these complexities are present in her art, the national narrative created around Priyubhashini's story is reductive.



Figure 16: Sculpture made by Priyubhashini is on display in the hallway at the war museum without any form of identification of the artist

Priyubhashini's testimony has been produced and reproduced by many national institutions to establish the kind of atrocities committed by the Pakistani army in 1971. Her entire life has been crystallized in a moment where the rape took place during the nine-month-long war, and her experiences before and after the war have been largely considered insignificant to an exploration of gender constructions in Bangladeshi society. Despite these institutional attempts, Priyubhashini narrates a complex story of her mother's struggle in an abusive marriage and later on the same pattern of abuse continuing in her own marriage. At a young age, Priyubhashini became the sole breadwinner of her family, providing not only for her husband and children but also for her mother and siblings. Priyubhashini's marriage came to an end in 1971 after years of physical and verbal abuse by her husband. Her economic needs made her vulnerable to abuse at her work place, which took the form of sexual abuse when the war started. During the war, Bangladeshi men and women refused to provide her shelter, as she was young and alone and therefore could not be trusted. Priyubhashini recalls,

Nobody gave shelter. I didn't know what I was going to do. Then I slowly walked to a shelter. This was a temporary shelter. Then a question arose about me. I was a bit younger. The wife complained, "Why is she staying here? She has three children and a husband." They didn't know I had separated from my husband. She suspected something illicit between her husband and I. She said some bad words. I got to know later on. Then I thought I must leave in the morning anyhow.

Priyubhashini was seen as sexually available not only by the Pakistani army but also by her fellow countrymen and women. She was accused of killing a university professor, arrested and taken to a sex camp where she was raped repeatedly by the soldiers. Priyubhashini's ordeal came to an end with a friendly encounter with a Pakistani army

officer, who after rescuing her proposed a marriage. But Priyubhashini saw that as a betrayal to her nation.

I said, “I can’t marry you. Marry a Pakistani army officer? After Bangladesh is liberated, my neighbours will know that I have absconded with a Pakistani army officer. Can you imagine the humiliation? The way I have survived the brutalities over the nine months, it is unthinkable to marry a Pakistani. I can’t do it on moral ground. I can’t betray my nation.

However, after the war Priyubhashini was betrayed by her nation. As is the case globally concerning rape survivors, Priyubhashini was considered complicit in the crime of rape and was socially ostracized. Priyubhashini’s story makes her nation uncomfortable on two accounts: 1) her brave testimony of rape by the Pakistani army despite social ostracization, and 2) her recollection of her encounter with the Pakistani army officer. Ferdousi witnessed the silencing and social ostracism of rape that took place after the war. Women who gave testimony were abandoned by their family members and boycotted by their communities. It was not until the late 1990s that Ferdousi publicly acknowledged that she had been raped in the war and demanded the setting up of a war crimes tribunal and trial of collaborators. As Nayanika Mookherjee notes in “The raped woman as a horrific sublime and the Bangladesh war of 1971” (2015), Ferdousi Priyubhashini and many other rape survivors gave testimonies in the early 2000s as part of “left-liberal activists’ attempts to rethink and rewrite 1971 in Bangladesh” (2). However, even today the public narratives of rape survivors remain engineered to suit the needs of those in power.

When examining the archives of the Liberation War Museum, it is impossible to miss the fact that rape took place in 1971. The images insist on bringing the past into the folds of the present and point out the absence and presence in the representation of

wartime rape. Instead of silencing the stories of wartime rape, the war museum offers evidence, invokes the history of rape and appropriates the rape of women for the nationalist cause. The rape of Bangladeshi women is narrated as a way of acting out power relationships by the Pakistani army – a policy implemented to humiliate the Bengali nation and to change the racial makeup of Bengalis who were considered Hindu-like and an inferior race. The highly evocative images on display remind us about the many women who were raped and killed during the war and seek justice, but these representations remain limited. In *The raped woman as a horrific sublime and the Bangladesh war of 1971* Nayanika Mookherjee examines the photograph of a young woman who was raped in the war with her loose hair and fists covering her face on display at the Liberation War Museum. The photograph has become the face of the birangana in the national memory and raises questions of the nation's fascination and discomfort with the raped women. Exploring the relationship between aesthetics and politics of visual representation of wartime rape, "These images animate an ambiguous pleasure – attracting and repelling the spectator at the same juncture (9). There are numerous similar images of rape victims on display at the war museum. Another photograph that captures the viewer's attention is of a young woman, raped and killed, shown bare chested and with disheveled hair (figure 17).

The imagery combined with the description of her youth, as Mookherjee points out, not only "horrifies the reader's sensibility, it also makes them aware of the gruesome loss of an idealized, beautiful Bengali woman who, otherwise, would have been available for 'legitimate' heterosexual motherhood" ("The absent piece of skin" 1584). Additionally, the picture invokes an aesthetic experience in the viewer through a

fetishizing of a woman's body and her trauma, albeit in the name of justice. The image of the raped and killed woman is used to give order and meaning to the crime of rape committed by the Pakistani army but the woman photographed represents a violence that cannot be transcended. Photographed in her most vulnerable of moments she is turned into a spectacle, sexualized, isolated and on display. The picture also creates anxiety in the viewer because of the reality and vastness of the trauma of wartime rape.



Figure 17: Rape on Display at Liberation War Museum, Dhaka. Original Caption: "Photograph taken on July 17 at Khajura, 9 miles north of Jessore. This young lady was a member of refugee group fleeing to India. She was caught by the Pakistani Army; then raped and killed. She is just one of the millions of such victims." Photo: S. M. Shafi (Jessore)"

The namelessness of the woman in the above picture gives rise to an ambiguity, which marks the trajectory of post-war experiences of many women. It must also be noted that most pictures at the museum depicting the omnipresence of rape in war show women who are no longer alive. The birangana is represented at the war museum as a numbed

and deadened body who demands justice. The war museum's involvement with the ongoing war trials against the collaborators who perpetrated rapes and murders with the Pakistani army give these images their evidentiary status without necessarily making visible the rape survivor.

Ferdousi Priyubhashini first gave her testimony in 1996 – the same year that the Liberation War Museum was founded. The pictures of the brutalized exposed bodies of women have been on display for many years, but until March of 2015, the only trace of Priyubhashini's story was present at the museum in the form of a sculpture without a caption or her name in the hallway of the war museum.

During my second research trip to Bangladesh in 2015, I was able to attend and film a play, titled “Jamuna”, performed at the Liberation War Museum. The play, heavily inspired by Ferdousi Priyubhashini's story, features a woman sculptor who is raped by Pakistani soldiers and as a result conceives a child. The play deals with her dilemma as her daughter gets married: “Should she break free from the shackles of her past and risk being ostracized by her friends and family? Or keep quite *[sic]* and break a promise?”



Figure 18: Play Jamuna based on Priyubhashini's story

Jamuna presents a curious rewriting of Priyubhashini's story. Many elements of Priyubhashini's story that are crucial in understanding the gender dimensions of her experiences during the war – such as her troubled childhood, her abusive marriage and workplace conditions – are treated as excesses. A lack of protection and support from her

countrymen during the war, her return to work, time at the sex camp established by the Pakistani army and the help she received from the army officer who helped with her release from the sex camp are also some of the events that complicate her story but are deemed unnecessary by the playwright. Priyubhashini's account of her post-war life becomes a victim of forgetfulness in this play. The play through its selection of bits and pieces from Priyubhashini's story, by summoning her to embody the entire nation highlights the nation's selective remembering and the dominant attitude of ambivalence towards women and rape survivors in Bangladesh. In the director's note, it is stated that the woman, a "freedom fighter" embodies the country and "Jamuna's success from the ashes to success as an artist is very similar to the journey of our country."

During my research in Bangladesh, I came across numerous academics and activists who were working hard alongside the government and the war museum to re-label rape survivors as "freedom fighters." This was the case at the International Conference on Bangladesh Genocide and Justice, organized by the Liberation War Museum. Samina Luthfa, a Dhaka-based academic who was also closely involved with the play *Jamuna*, based on Ferdousi Priyubhashini's story, referred to rape victims in her presentation as freedom fighters. Another presenter, Umme Wara, a lecturer from Dhaka University, quoted a ruling by the International Crimes Tribunal of Bangladesh in which rape victims and war babies were honoured for their "sacrifice" for the country and given the title of 'freedom fighters.' Wara emphasized the need to create an environment where instead of feeling ostracized, rape victims would "take pride in their stories."

Additionally, pointing out a resolution passed by the Bangladeshi parliament, which

recognizes Biranganas as freedom fighters, Wara talked about the government's efforts to compile a list of women who were raped. According to Wara,

But of course at the end there is a problem that how do we distinct that who were the victims of sexual violence and who were not because we know that there is not always a witness when a rape is committed or a torture is committed. But of course I believe that it will not be a great amount that there will be a fake person who will come for that. Maybe a little bit, or a little portion. So, for that, for Liberation War Museum or International Crimes Tribunal, they have a good list of war victims. So, we can start from that because we don't want to see in that way that the more victims we can accommodate that is a success. No. The success is even if it's 100, even if it is 1000, we are giving rehabilitation to those specific 100 or 1000 war victims. Not into the quantity, we will look into the quality. So, we will have to look into the process of distinction that who is victim and how to get her story and how to rehabilitate her. So that's a challenge, another challenge. (International Conference on Bangladesh Genocide and Justice, Conference Proceedings Audio)

Wara's comments about false rape claims contradict the well-documented fact that globally rape remains an underreported crime, but more specifically wartime rape in Bangladesh has been grossly underreported as the victims who reported were socially ostracized and abandoned by their families. Additionally, the suggestion that rape victims should take pride in their stories, or that rape can somehow be articulated as a sacrifice for the nation seemed to lack compassion and understanding of women's trauma. The rape victims did not choose to get raped for the sake of liberation. They were assaulted. It was after attending the conference that I revisited Ferdousi Priyubhashini and asked her about the title "freedom fighter." In that recorded conversation, she told me that she did not consider herself a freedom fighter but a *Birangana*. The title *Birangana* remains problematic for feminist scholars. In a conversation with Nayanika Mookherjee, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak affirms, "Especially for the women themselves, one must realize it's

not altogether positive. It's like calling the untouchable *harijan*⁶—Dalits refuse it. It's that right to refusal that needs to be developed" (Reproductive Heteronormativity and Sexual Violence in the Bangladesh War of 1971, 130). In Priyubhashini's case, she refuses the label of "freedom fighter" and chooses "birangana". She asserts, "I don't feel comfortable to become freedom fighter because I did not fight with a weapon or anything. I think I am a rape victim. A birangana." To develop a woman's right to refuse to be labeled is not a radical idea; it is a project in women's empowerment and requires a shift of power dynamics in the existing discourses of war.

On 12 October 2015, the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs issued a notification, adding the names of 41 Biranganas to the list of freedom fighters. As freedom fighters, these women will now be able to receive an allowance, micro-credit, training, employment opportunities, and other assistance from the government. I examined the list to find Ferdousi Priyubhashini's name, but her name was not there. Two days later, a local newspaper in Dhaka published Priyubhashini's response to the news. She expressed anger and disappointment over "being left out of freedom fighters' list" (Pritom bdnews24.com). While this shows a change in Priyubhashini's earlier position on the issue, it points out something far more concerning. The paper quotes the Liberation War Affairs Secretary MA Hannan, who says, "Those who really have had a role in the Liberation War will surely get recognition" (Pritom bdnews24.com). Hannan's statement confirms the point made by Umme Wara about the compilation of the list of Biranganas. With that understanding, it seems plausible that Priyubhashini's anger is not necessarily at not being included in the list of freedom fighters, but being excluded from the list of

⁶ Harijan is a term popularized by Mahatma Gandhi for referring to Dalits, traditionally considered to be Untouchable.

Biranganas. Ferdousi Priyubhashini's story remains controversial to some who claim that she was not raped, but had a consensual sexual relationship with a Pakistani army officer. Another story in circulation in Bangladesh is that the opposition leader, Khaleda Zia, was raped by the Pakistani army during the war but she denies it. Conveniently enough, all records of rape, including police reports and medical records, were destroyed after the war, making it close to impossible to verify this or any other story. The absence of official records coupled with the omissions in national archives creates a gap that can only be filled in through survivor's testimony.

Sultana Kamal



Figure 19: Sultana Kamal

The Female Freedom Fighter⁷

Sultana Kamal is a lawyer, human rights activist and the Executive Director of Ain-o-Salish Kendra, a non-governmental organization based in Dhaka. In 1996, Kamal received the John Humphrey Freedom Award by Canadian group “Rights & Democracy” (International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development) for promoting democratic development or respect for human rights in Bangladesh. Among the many organizations that she is involved with are Freedom Foundation, Transparency International Bangladesh, Asia Pacific Forum for Women Law and Development (Regional Network), Women Living Under Muslim Laws (International Network), South Asians For Human Right and South Asian Partnership. She has written a book and continues to write in the dailies and periodicals on social, legal and gender issues. To have a meeting with Sultana Kamal did not prove easy, but after several phone calls and emails, I was able to book an appointment with her for a filmed interview. The walls of her office are adorned with pictures of her mother, Sufia Kamal, who was a Bangladeshi poet and political activist. Sufia Kamal was influenced by Rokeya Sakhawat and named her daughter after the celebrated feminist text by Sakhawat. Sultana Kamal says,

I was named Sultana and this name was taken from Begum Rokeya’s, or Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain’s fantasy *Sultana’s Dream*, where Sultana, the protagonist, dreams of a world or a land, which is “ladyland” where women have not only equal rights but they rule.

Sufia Kamal became actively involved in social and political causes in the 1950s with the rise of the Language Movement. In 1969, she formed Mohila Sangram Parishad (Women's Struggle Group) and during the war helped freedom fighters with exchange of

⁷ Interview transcript in Appendix 2D

information and resources. After the war, her work was focused on rehabilitation efforts for rape survivors of the war. She was also involved with an organization, Nirmul Committee, demanding trial of all War Criminals of 1971. Sufia Kamal passed away in 1999. Sultana Kamal has followed her mother's footsteps in her work with women's rights and also with the war trials. In September 2012, Sultana Kamal gave testimony at the International Crimes Tribunal against former Jamaat-e-Islami leader, Ghulam Azam, calling him 'mastermind' of crimes committed during the country's war of liberation in 1971 ("War Crimes: Golam Azam mastermind: Sultana Kamal" Web). Sultana Kamal's story stresses her belonging to a politically engaged family, in addition to her pride in her contributions to the war of 1971. But she also reminds us that her contribution and that of many other women were primarily in assisting roles, instead of engaging in combat.



Figure 20: Painting of Sufia Kamal at Sultana Kamal's office, Ain-o-Salish Kendra

The Liberation War Museum of Bangladesh has on display small passport size photographs of two female freedom fighters who are officially recognized and honoured by the state. After some research, I was able to locate Taramon Bibi, one of the two female freedom fighters. However, I was advised that it was not safe to travel to her village in the aftermath of the state's execution of the first war criminal. As a result, I ended up recording a phone interview with Bibi. My second attempt at interviewing her was in January 2015, but initially it was the ongoing political turmoil and the arson attacks that kept me from visiting her, and later on, I learned that Bibi was hospitalized due to ill health and was not able to see visitors. After the war of 1971, Taramon Bibi was awarded "Bir Protik" in absentia in 1973. There was no trace of her whereabouts, nor is there any indication that anyone looked for her. In 1995, a researcher found her in dire poverty and suffering from Tuberculosis. Bibi received help from non-governmental organizations, which ensured that she received support and recognition from the government. In 2015, she was hospitalized for respiratory conditions. Here is an excerpt from my phone interview with Bir Protik Taramon Bibi:

I moved into the camp and started working for the freedom fighters. I would cook for them but I would also hide their weapons so that if there were raids, people wouldn't find anything. When I was working there, I started calling Muhib Habilder "father". He started telling me that I had a lot of courage, that I was strong and fearless. So he said, lets give you some more training. He trained me on how to fire a gun, etc. ... After that Muhib Habilder said that a rifle gun is not enough because the shots can go here and there, I will teach you how to use a stun gun. So, he taught me how to use a stun gun. So when ever there were little battles (or skirmishes) I would be cooking and doing everything they asked me to do at the camp, I would also work as an informer, and fight in gun battles. Once we were sitting for a meal and Muhib Habilder

said, Taramon we've just sat down to eat and we didn't recce. I forgot to recce. Can you climb up the tree and make sure that everything is clear? I climbed up the tree with a binocular and I saw that there was a gunboat coming from the other side of the river. I just ran down and shouted that there was a gunboat coming with the Pakistani army and then they all got together. I was a part of that with my gun. We attacked the boat. No one from our side was killed but a lot of the Pakistani soldiers were killed. And it was a battle that we won. That was the biggest battle I fought.

During the war of 1971, many women wanted to defend their nation in the war efforts. Women's desire to fight in war is certainly not a phenomenon unique to the war of 1971, including Sufia Kamal, Sultana Kamal, and Taramon Bibi. In the United States of America, upon demands from women, the military recently opened all combat roles to women. The decision, seen as a march towards gender equality and inclusiveness, has been generally celebrated by women. The *New York Times* reports, "Many women hailed the decision. 'I'm overjoyed,' said Katelyn van Dam, an attack helicopter pilot in the Marine Corps who has deployed to Afghanistan. 'Now if there is some little girl who wants to be a tanker, no one can tell her she can't.'" (Rosenberg and Philipps, "All Combat Roles Now Open to Women" Web). Feminist scholars, such as Cynthia Enloe have written extensively about militarization of nation-state and the ideological structures that encourage women to join the military. In *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*, Enloe writes that militarization is a process of ideological, institutional, and economic transformation which can occur "in the corridors of a government or on the streets during a protest, requires both women's and men's acquiescence, but it privileges masculinity" (4). Enloe argues that military officials and civil state authorities, those with vested interest in waging war, tend to maneuver different groups of women and the ideas regarding what constitutes femininity so that the

military objectives could be served (36). Because this transformation takes place over a period of time and in the name of nation's pride and patriotism, it is not easy for women to see the gendered nature of their militarization. For many women in Bangladesh the rhetoric of nationalism and hope for an independent country provided inspiration to fight in the war. In *Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh*, Yasmin Saikia writes that for many women that remained a dream, as they were unable to find an entry point in the male dominated war. Saikia writes, "Women's reality as secondary citizens limited the exercise of their agency even before independent Bangladesh was born" (187). Sultana Kamal's testimony also confirms that women were generally pushed out of the battlefield and encouraged to offer support in secondary roles as care providers and nurses. Kamal remembers, "The leadership in the war also had a particular idea of men's role and women's role. Like we were immediately engaged to build a hospital and run the hospital rather than them thinking that we could be trained in arms to really fight the guerrilla warfare." The gendered nature of women's militarization is evident in Taramon Bibi's testimony where familial structures are reproduced in battlefield. After joining the militia, Bibi started calling Muhib Habilder "father" and her primary role was to cook for the freedom fighters. The sexual division of labour during the war remained and shifted only temporarily when the group came under attack and the roles went back to "normal" after the war ended.

It is important to note that the original question behind the war of 1971 was framed as one about national identity, culture, language and equality, where gender was something to be overcome. Women wanted to become agents of change to fight the common national enemy and therefore chose to overcome the accepted feminine space of

home and participate in the war efforts in whatever capacity possible. The Liberation War Museum in Bangladesh has on display some images of women who fought in the war. The photographs of women raising their arms and holding rifles provide for a moving imagery, depicting women as equal participants in the war against a common national enemy. However, the exhibit shows ambivalence towards the gender politics that ensued after the war. Kamal notes that in the beginning women were only mentioned in the history of liberation war as victims of rape and not as freedom fighters. The situation was different for Kamal. Due to her politically influential family, Kamal, her sister and her mother were recognized as freedom fighters soon after the war. Efforts by non-governmental organizations and women's rights organizations forced the government to recognize that some women actively fought alongside their male counterparts during the liberation war. According to Kamal,

There were many other women who actually fought in many other ways who were not actually, you know, were not looked for in the beginning; when they were looked for there were many lapses in the process and that's why many many female freedom fighters were not even mentioned anywhere in the history or any discourse

After the war a total of 426 Bir Protik awards were given to freedom fighters for their actions in the liberation war of 1971 – Bir Protik is the fourth highest gallantry award in Bangladesh – and out of those only two were women. Bir Protik Taramon Bibi is one of the two female freedom fighters formally recognized and honoured by the Bangladeshi government. The small photograph on display at the war museum can be easily missed. It carries the following lines:

The brief description of these women's contribution to the war of liberation deems it unnecessary to offer a hint of their disappearance into oblivion in the years that followed the war. Taramon Bibi feels that she was ignored because she is a woman and people don't take women freedom fighters seriously (Amin, Aasha M, Lavina Ahmed, and Shamim Ahsan, "The Women in Our Liberation War"). In the case of Sitara Begum, soon after fighting in the liberation war of Bangladesh, she got married and chose a quiet life for herself in the United States of America. Her brother, also a high-ranking freedom fighter, was assassinated in 1975 along with the nation's founding father, Sheikh Mujib and other political leaders. Sultana Kamal's testimony offers us an opening into gender constructions during the war of 1971 and the narrative that has emerged post-war. The archives of the war museum emphasize a particular portrayal of women in the war: as victims of sexual assault and as assisting male freedom fighters, which creates a direct conflict with the way women remember the war, especially Sultana Kamal, who claims that all women should be considered freedom fighters.

The war museum undoubtedly depicts the trauma of the 1971 war. But in the narrative constructed by the museum the trauma endured by women is displayed through absence and in this research project that absence is being challenged through women's testimonies. Women in this project testify to great personal losses. According to LaCapra, in an obvious and restricted sense losses may entail absences, but the converse need not be the case. While the war museum tells the story of sheer absence of "utter annihilation," the narrative created by women in this project is about the historical past, which is "the scene of losses that may be narrated as well as of specific possibilities that may conceivably be reactivated, reconfigured, and transformed in the present or future"

(LaCapra, 700). History-writing is interpretive work and survivors' testimonies in *Naristhan/Ladyland* emphasize that the truths that the research is engaging with are contingent, fragmented and inconclusive, and they can only be accessible through memory. After the Holocaust, testimony emerged not only as a historical record but also as a viable way to access traumatic memory and to remember with a deepened understanding. After returning from Auschwitz, Primo Levi wrote his first book, *If This Is a Man* (1958), chronicling his time in Auschwitz. Levi's journey begins as he is captured by the Fascist Militia on 13 December 1943 to be transferred to the concentration camp in February 1944 where he witnessed atrocities and death and disappearance of Jewish men, women and children. In his book, Levi provides an unflinching description of the camp. The intention as Levi describes in *Conversations With Primo Levi* was to "leave an eye-witness account" (43).

I wrote because I felt the need to write. If you ask me to go further and find out what produced this need, I can't answer. I've had the feeling that for me the act of writing was equivalent to lying down on Freud's couch. I felt such an overpowering need to talk about it that I talked out loud. Back then, in the concentration camp, I often had a dream: I dreamed that I'd returned, come home to my family, told them about it, and nobody listened. The person standing in front of me doesn't stay to hear, he turns around and goes away. I told this dream to my friends in the concentration camp, and they said, 'It happens to us too.' (42)

Like many survivors of the Holocaust and other genocides, Levi offers his testimony as an act of witness and to ensure that people who did not see are able to register the crimes that were committed during the Second World War. As Janet Walker writes in *Testimony in the Umbra of Trauma*, survivor testimony is a critical tool for historiography and the

University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education archive has 52,000 video-taped interviews with Holocaust survivors (92).

Dori Laub in her work with Holocaust survivors established the element of unbelievability in survivor's testimony. In my research, the survivors of the 1971 genocide in Bangladesh testify not only to the unbelievable but also that which is silenced. After the war of 1971, as Saikia's research (2007 and 2011) shows, any evidence of gendered violence, including medical records and police reports, was destroyed by the government in an attempt to rehabilitate the rape survivors. In the absence of any other kind of evidence, it is only the personal testimony of the survivor that offers proof of the kind of atrocities that took place in the war of 1971, and that is precisely the reason why testimonies are so crucial for historical representations. Janet Walker writes,

... empirically based realist historiography may not be the most appropriate mode for certain historical representations because it may not take into sufficient account the vicissitudes of historical representation and memory. We have an ethical and political obligation to remember, acknowledge constantly, and deal with traumatic events of the past. But at the same time, we must acknowledge that these events are subject to interpretation as they are remembered, spoken of, written down, or visually communicated. ("The Traumatic Paradox" 806)

Testimonies offer a valid way of knowing as they struggle against forgetting and help us create a more complete picture of a historical event and move towards a society that is just and accountable. Additionally, video testimony, by allowing us to see and hear, offers the viewers a better access to the historical event in question.

The narratives produced by the interviewees are their lived experiences and personal stories, which are often fragmented but can be linked to a broader political

context. In total, there were over 20 interviews conducted during my fieldwork. For the purpose of this doctoral research, I have decided to focus on some interviews, instead of all, allowing the survivors the time to expand into detail. Because of the information that was being produced and the analysis that was emerging, I decided to privilege the depth of their stories over including more voices. Aroma Dutta's testimony offers a unique perspective of a woman from a religious minority group in a country that is deeply religious and increasingly intolerant towards religious minorities. Dutta's mother, Pratiti Devi, not only saw the war of 1971, but she also witnessed the 1947 partition of India. Devi saw the changing politics and struggles in the region and the religious minorities' stories of contributions to independence being downplayed in the national memory. In this project Aroma Dutta and Pratiti Devi not only recall the violence endured by religious minorities in the war of 1971 but also the violence committed by the nationalist discourse as the contributions of a political family that suffered great losses in the war are minimized in the writing of history. Through their testimony, Aroma Dutta and Pratiti Devi challenge the archives. Saira Bano is a refugee in Bangladesh. It was difficult to ascertain her age and her exact whereabouts during the war, but in her case the omissions are gaps in her own memory. These gaps in memory are a direct result of a nation's unease and continued refusal to acknowledge the losses sustained by the Urdu-speaking population of Bangladesh. Their trauma suffers a total omission in the archive because it cannot be integrated in the national memory, which insists on claiming the refugee experience only for the Bengalis who left for India due to the war. Additionally, these internally displaced Urdu-speaking refugees and their children born after the war have become the national enemy in the public opinion as they are seen as collaborators in the

crimes committed by the Pakistani army. Saira Bano's testimony reminds us of the deep psychological scars from the war that still have not healed. Juxtaposed with the national memory of the refugees, Bano's testimony points out the total omission in the archive of the war museum. The story of Ferdousi Priyubhashini has been the most challenging to process and edit, as there are many interviews of her in the public domain; the interviews are always in Bangla language and are subject to the needs and biases of the interviewers that result in omissions and a particular framing of her story. The gendered violence against women that has come to be associated with women and war in its most simplified form is in fact a complex story as narrated by Priyubhashini. Her story is of betrayal by her countrymen, rape by the enemy and social ostracization and accusation of complicity in her rape in the aftermath of the war. In the national memory, aspects of her story are appropriated to make a claim that Bengali women were raped by Pakistani soldiers but the rest is discarded as superfluous. Sultana Kamal's story allows us to see women's participation in the war of 1971, in particular the gendered dimensions of the war at the frontline as women who wanted to fight were pushed into domestic roles. However, the archives of the war museum show women carrying guns, implying that men and women fought as equals in the war. The national narrative is further problematized as only two out of 426 freedom fighters who received government honour were women.

Gender is undoubtedly the common theme among the four testimonies. However, the four testimonies articulate gender differently. Gender in Ferdousi Priyubhashini's story is articulated at the intersection of her identity as a woman and as a Bengali. Aroma Dutta and Pratiti Devi's gendered identity also involves religion; Saira Bano's gendered identity involves her ethnic affiliation and her socio-economic class; and Sultana Kamal's

testimony helps us understand gender in light of her political and upper socio-economic class and the militarization of women. The testimonies in this research effectively represent the multiplicity of women's experiences in genocide. Instead of offering a unitary truth, these stories all come together to compose a more complete account of the war of 1971, which is currently not being publicly circulated. Through their stories, we can begin to see the multiple ways gender is implicated in the war of 1971.

The function of resisting official history as performed by these testimonies individually is significant. Collectively, the testimonies in this research depict the specificity of women's experiences in genocide and reject any notion of a unified and shared gendered experience as belonging to the domain of the imaginary. The experiences of the women featured here are shaped by the various dimensions of their identities. These encounters are unique as each woman faced the genocide at the intersection of her class, ethnicity and religion. Aroma Dutta's experience is shaped by the marginalization of a woman in a post-colonial, patriarchal society and being a Hindu minority in a Muslim country. Saira Bano, as a woman living in a refugee camp in Bangladesh, offers her testimony as situated at the intersection of her ethnic identity, in addition to her identity as a woman belonging to a lower socio-economic class. Ferdousi Priyubhashini offers her testimony as a woman who during the war was enchanted by the nationalist ideologies but was ostracized by her countrymen in independent Bangladesh. Sultana Kamal, belonging to a highly influential political family and an upper socio-economic class, experienced the war and its aftermath from a different lens. These four testimonies remind us of intersectionality and the inapplicability of the either/or scenario that forces a generalization on women's experiences in war. These women did not simply

experience the war as “women” but as belonging to different identity groups – as Hindu minority women, Urdu-speaking Bihari women, and from different social classes. They remind us of Kimberle Crenshaw’s seminal work on intersectionality, in which Crenshaw notes, “When the practices expound identity as woman or person of colour as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of colour to a location that resists telling” (1242). The limited and simplified representations of women’s experiences in war perform the function of restricting the multiple subjectivities.

The archives of the Liberation War Museum of Bangladesh through their inclusion and omission perform the function of narrativizing the war as a unified account of history where all the outliers are muted and a generalization is forced upon women. In these archives, the only expression of rape is visible among the dead women, as if all the women who were raped died in the war of 1971. This shows a nation’s uncomfortable relationship to the trauma that women had to go through in the national struggle, which didn’t end with the war in 1971. The images of female freedom fighters are also mobilized in a way that brings to the forefront a general ambivalence the nation showed towards women who wanted to participate in the war against a national enemy but could only find a place in the national struggle as caregivers. The images of refugees on display seek to erase any memory of the Bihari refugees who have been living in refugee camps for over four decades. The nationalist discourse on display at the war museum performs the violent act of selecting from life and death the stories that are worth telling and subjects women to a double marginalization within the ideologies of nation and nationalism. The images of war memorialized and widely circulated at the museum perform the function of assigning significance to shared experiences, common ideas and

nationalist formations in an attempt to create a nationalist history of the war, but gender representations in the exhibits remain problematic. The testimonies of female survivors resist the national memory and help to create an account of the war which is more inclusive.

Chapter 8

CONCLUSION

“I wonder how people remember things who don't film, don't photograph, don't tape. How has mankind managed to remember?” Chris Marker, *Sans Soleil* (1993)

From painting to photography, the image world has always been a domain of memory. The advent of the camera has made it easier for mankind to frame and remember reality. But this remembrance remains a matter of framing. What does the photographer find worthy of capturing and how has the photographer decided to frame that reality, impacts the life of that memory. Different angles give rise to different frames and show different subjectivities around the same memory. Furthermore, the institutional discourse created around the image gives it a greater authority and makes it part of the collective memory. Images of war, while evidentiary, show subjective views of reality and postwar these images are canonized in archives where power is exercised in constructing a narrative about the war. As Susan Sontag writes in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, “War-making and picture taking are congruent activities” (53). The violence committed during war is often repeated through war photography in the form of omissions and appropriations. The politics of appropriation of women’s trauma and their victimization in images of war are so strong that sometimes a woman is summoned to be a victim and a perpetrator at the same time, without any regard to her own identity and self-representation. Consider, for instance, the following photograph from Bangladesh.



Figure 22: “These women mourn their relatives, killed during the battles leading to the division of Pakistan, 1971”

Photograph by Marc Riboud; Copyright: Marc Riboud

This haunting photograph was taken by a French Magnum photographer, named Marc Riboud in 1971 in Bangladesh and has since appeared on many public forums. The Magnum Photo Agency, formed in Paris in 1947, globalized the world of photography and as Sontag writes, “The photographer was a rover, with wars of unusual interest (for there were many wars) a favourite destination” (29). In many war photographs taken by Western photographers intended primarily for Western viewers, Christian iconography is hard to miss. These images in their depiction of pain evoke compassion in the viewers. Similarly, in the above photograph by Riboud, of a mother holding a child, it is easy to discern the traces of Madonna and Child. The photograph evokes pre-existing traditions of visual representation in showing its viewers the reality of war. But this image of grieving women while representing the brutal reality of war also hollows it out of the local memory of the war, as the victims and their trauma remain unnamed. This photograph by Riboud has gone through numerous instances of appropriation by different interest groups.

Captions tend to explain photographs or falsify them, writes Susan Sontag in *Regarding the Pain of Others* (11). On Riboud’s website, the photograph was initially captioned, "India, 1971, women Bengali refugees" (Riboud, Marcriboud.com). On the website for Dhaka-based Drik gallery, the picture has been catalogued under their collection “The Birth Pangs of a Nation” with text and images of war that prove atrocities committed towards Bengali men and women. The photograph itself carries no caption (The Birth Pangs of a Nation, Drik). On an Indian website, Tasveer Gallery, it is called, "Bhiaris [sic] Women, Bangladesh" (Marc Riboud, Tasveer). On yet another website, the caption says, “Bangladesh 1971. Ces femmes biharis viennent de voir leur maris se faire

massacre devant elles par les Bengalis après l'indépendance du Bangladesh.” Noticing the contradictory captions, I contacted Marc Riboud to affirm the origin of this image and the identity of the women photographed. In an email reply Riboud wrote, the image is titled, “Surrender of Dacca” and he is quite sure that this photograph was taken in Bangladesh, in Dacca or very close to Dacca. Since my exchange with Riboud in October 2013, the caption on his website has been changed: “These women mourn their relatives, killed during the battles leading to the division of Pakistan, 1971” (Riboud, Marc Riboud.com). The fact that the photograph has been appropriated by different groups to serve their nationalist agenda is obvious. But what is remarkable is how little we know about the women in the picture. There are essentially no identifiers: no names, no location, and no way to trace the women photographed. The photograph tells the story of war and not of the women photographed. Throughout my doctoral research, I was unable to forget this image and it came up in many conversations. This image became one of the reasons why I felt my research interests were justified and the image became symbolic of the project. The anonymity and appropriation of a woman’s image and her story have to be challenged to create a more inclusive account of history and that is the intervention my doctoral research attempts to make. To achieve that end, I have looked towards female survivors’ testimony to guide this research and locate the complexity of women’s experiences in a nationalist project.

In this research project, I have endeavoured to resist the national forgetting of women’s trauma from the dominant discourses of war and have provided a version of history that is a bit more complete than the one which is currently in circulation. The Liberation War Museum of Bangladesh as a site of representation reflects political

undertakings, collective aspirations and national memory. Examining the displays and archives of the museum, I have attempted to challenge the dominant memory of the liberation war of 1971, which deems certain experiences and lived realities excessive to the national memory. The overall tone of the exhibit at the museum is celebratory towards the nation's victory and survival. It also narrativizes the story of the nation's loss as a result of the atrocities committed by the Pakistani army during the nine month long war, but women's stories are largely absent from its displays. The complexity of women's experiences in the war as Hindu minorities, ethnic minorities, rape survivors, and freedom fighters are suppressed in the name of the nation. History at the war museum has been simplified to orient individuals towards a nationalist cause and what is knowable is significantly reduced. My research makes visible the absences and omissions in the national memory and opens up a possibility of coming together to create a narrative of historical trauma that does not seek to obliterate differences. This coming together does not demand full consensus on the interpretive work that always accompanies projects of memory. The survivors' stories are in no way uniform in their losses as they all present different constructs of gender and identity and moments of victimization before, during and after the war of 1971.

My thesis points out the anonymity and appropriation of women's images and their stories in order to conform to the dominant representations that construct the nationalist agenda. Aroma Dutta and Pratiti Devi Ghattak remind us that while Bengali nationalism was predominantly organized around the question of Bengali language and identity, religion added another layer of complexity to women's experiences in the war of 1971. Aroma Dutta's grandfather, Dhirendranath Dutta was one of the first Bengali

leaders to raise the issue of national language and was subsequently barred from participating in politics by the Urdu-speaking government and killed by the army in the war of 1971. Dutta's testimony not only emphasizes the importance of language in articulating nationalism but it also highlights the double marginalization and the constant fear facing women from religious minority groups. In a country created in the name of Islam in 1947, where Bengalis were seen as Hindu-like and discriminated against, Hindu minorities bore the brunt of the war and were brutally killed by the Pakistani army. The mistrust towards Hindus has continued in contemporary Bangladesh and it is evidenced in the display at the war museum, which seeks to minimize the contributions of Hindu political leaders in the nation's liberation efforts. Religion and ethnicity marked women's experiences in the war of 1971 and the national remembrance still carries those traces. My interview with Saira Bano shows how a woman can be perceived as a perpetrator while still being a victim of the war. Since some members of the Urdu-speaking Bihari community in Bangladesh collaborated with the Pakistani army in the war of 1971, the whole community including children born years after the war are branded as national enemies. Saira Bano as an Urdu-speaking, internally displaced refugee is therefore also seen in the national narrative as an enemy. However, Bano suffered personal losses in the war and continues to live in poverty. Bano's story highlights a gendered experience of the war located at the intersection of ethnicity and social class as she continues to live in a refugee camp in Dhaka under impoverished conditions. Her trauma from the war of 1971 is considered insignificant, if not problematic, and therefore has not found expression in national memory. The fraught relationship between women's experiences in war and nationalist discourses is hard to miss in the representations of rape at the war museum.

The shame that accompanies sexual violence in nationalist struggle is evident in the treatment of rape survivors in Bangladesh after the war, in particular it can be seen in Ferdousi Priyubhashini's story. The complexity of gender construct within nation prior to the war, which forces women into a subordinate position compared to their male counterparts and contributes to wartime rape, is ignored and the experiences of a rape survivor are crystallized into that moment of rape. In nationalist discourses, the wartime rape of a woman is seen as the rape of the nation. Priyubhashini's story brings to the forefront a national remembering that is consumed with a need for justice for rape victims in war tribunals but pays no heed to rape survivors. The social ostracization women face after the war and the politicisation of the gendered violence experienced by them create double marginalization of women in national memory. At the Liberation War Museum of Bangladesh, the presence of numerous images of women who were raped and killed in the war and a general absence of rape survivors insist on the belonging of wartime rape in the past. But Priyubhashini testifies to the continuation of trauma for women even decades after the war. Sultana Kamal's testimony brings to this research an account of a nation's troubled relationship with women freedom fighters, which seeks to valorize them and anonymize them at the same time. While Sultana Kamal because of her politically engaged upper class family had little difficulty finding recognition for her war efforts, countless female freedom fighters were generally forgotten. During the war, most women who wanted to fight on the frontlines were pushed into a domestic role of caretakers, reaffirming women's role within nationalism as reproducers and in a domestic capacity, and a few who were allowed active participation in combat roles were forgotten once the war was over. The story of Taramon Bibi confirms that fact. It also contradicts the many

visual representations of women holding guns at the Liberation War Museum, which also downplays the fact that only two out of the 426 officially recognized freedom fighters were women. While the Liberation War Museum presents an incomplete picture of women's experiences in the war of 1971, women in this project testify to fill in the gaps in national memory and tell a story of loss and trauma. In my research, I do not intend to present a view from above; my outlook on women's situations comes from a specific position in history, from the testimonies of survivors whose lives were interrupted if not stopped in the war and for whom the trauma of war is not really over.

The testimonies of survivors have guided this research and helped to locate the individual within the collective. With testimonies of an internally displaced refugee woman from the enemy side, a service provider, a rape survivor, and two Hindu women I have tried to bring to the forefront the multiplicity of women's experiences in war. In this multiplicity, included are some of the differences that are not always desirable within the collectivity of "Bengal" nation. Taking a feminist approach that is informed by local histories, realities, and needs, this research has built alliances across boundaries and between women belonging to various social and ethnic groups. This research project is a site where multiple subjectivities come together to investigate the omissions in memory and for the re-telling of a story. Trinh writes, "In telling one's story, one is told" (*D-Passage: The Digital Way* 66). Throughout this work, I have attempted to remain reflexive and maintain a position that is expressly subjective as a researcher and filmmaker with complicated ties to South Asia and can therefore also be held accountable in my research.

In *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, Donna Haraway writes about the importance of situated knowledge and webbed connections. Local knowledge, which is partial by all accounts, has to be situated within the broader framework of knowledge and power in order to provide a better account of the world. The politics of location and positioning, of the survivors and the filmmaker, are at the forefront in my research. Haraway argues:

The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular. The science question in feminism is about objectivity as positioned rationality. Its images are not the products of escape and transcendence of limits, i.e., the view from above, but the joining of partial views and halting voices into a collective subject position that promises a vision of the means of ongoing finite embodiment, of living within limits and contradictions, i.e., of views from somewhere. (196)

The situated knowledge of the survivors takes us to a particular place in time, space and consciousness of local history and enables the joining together of their partiality into a collective subject position, which in Haraway's term gives rise to a 'feminist objectivity.' In the context of my research, the joining together in meaning-making takes place at other levels as well; as the essayistic subject I join the survivors in finding a larger vision. Using visualization technologies, I foreground knowledge and subjectivity at every articulation of war, in every locally situated conversation with survivors. Finally, the film sets the ground for a joining together with the audience in order to have a conversation based on their lived reality, experiences, and struggles. It is hoped that the viewers of the film would interpret, translate and reconcile the tension presented in the film with their own existing views and subjectivities and can either accept or reject what is being presented in the film. In doing this, this film invites the viewers into a critical engagement with questions of representation, nationalism and public texts. My efforts in this project can be summed up using the following lines from Trinh:

A responsible work today seems to me above all to be one that shows, on the one hand, a political commitment and an ideological lucidity, and is, on the other hand interrogative by nature, instead of being merely prescriptive. In other words, a work that involves her story in history; a work that acknowledges the difference between lived experience and representation; a work that is careful not to turn a struggle into an object of consumption, and requires that responsibility be assumed by the maker as well as by the audience, without whose participation no solution emerges, for no solution exist as a given. (When the Moon Waxes Red, 149)

Naristhan/Ladyland is an intervention in the dominant representations of gender and the notion of access to universal truth. It insists on acknowledging differences in gendered experiences of war and offers a counter-narrative that includes women's experiences in the history of the liberation war in Bangladesh. This work, the film and the written component, strives not to turn women's struggles and their trauma into an object of consumption, but invites viewers and readers to engage in critical thinking about the dominant discourses of history.

Academic research rooted in creative art closes the gap between theory and creative practice. Practice-based research treats creative art as compatible with theory and capable of offering insights into real problems in the real world, making it also self-reflexive. As a South Asian feminist filmmaker, it is my own lived reality of my gender that has guided my work. In *Naristhan/Ladyland* I have tried to capture the trauma and human agency in meaning-making within a culture. The film brings women's experiences and their stories out of the private and into the public domain and challenges the hegemonic reading of the war of 1971. It names the experiences and individuals who were previously silenced in favour of the nation. My doctoral thesis offers an opening point into reading culture and gendered experiences of war, and through the film I hope

to transmit knowledge produced through research back into society. In “The Emergence of Cultural Studies and the Crisis of the Humanities,” Stuart Hall discusses the political nature of cultural studies in engaging with “some real problem out there in the dirty world” (17) and the need to translate knowledge back into practice. Hall writes, “Neither the one nor the other alone would do” (18). Practice-based research is communicative of problems and resolutions. It offers, as Melissa Gregg argues, a multi-layering of arguments, which “would otherwise appear as a dense and prosaic discussion,” and makes “the complexities of cultural debates more attractive to a broader audience” (367). This has been the ultimate goal of my research. *Naristhan/Ladyland* problematizes the articulation of gender in the national memory of the war of 1971. As a cultural text, the film seeks to make an intervention in the ongoing discussions of gender and war not just in Bangladesh but hopefully for a wider audience.

In addition to the existing films that take a reflexive approach in highlighting differences within the unified category of women, most notably the works of Trinh T. Minh-ha, I also see it as a contribution to what Janet Walker calls trauma cinema.

As representational objects, they are by definition a generation removed from the catastrophes they depict, and their audiences maybe a generation removed from the original sufferers. But in and through this remove, trauma films and videos model a new and empathetic historiography after the demands of the world where audiovisual culture is extensive and people at odds live in close proximity to one another (“Trauma Cinema” 193).

Through my doctoral research, including the film, I have attempted to represent complex realities that are often contradictory, political, and trans-local in nature. History is a contestable subject, especially in postcolonial South Asia, driven by various ideologies. The ideologies of nation and religion are saturated with structures of power and

dominance where women become the muted subject of history. This research through its intervention in the writing of history is also a humble contribution to the existing research on history-writing in postcolonial South Asia by leading scholars such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Yasmin Saikia, and Nayanika Mookherjee who have written extensively about the subaltern woman.

One of the questions that demand further inquiry is the affiliation of many Bangladeshi feminist scholars with the Liberation War Museum and its nationalist ideologies. Considering the existing feminist scholarship on gender and nationalism (Enloe, McClintock, Anthias, Campling, and Yuval-Davis), which demonstrates the secondary position women occupy within nationalism, the support of Bangladeshi feminists for nationalism can only be rooted in historical specificity of the region. In Bangladesh, the nationalist movement prior to the war of 1971 demanded an alliance be made between feminists and nationalists to defeat the national enemy, the government of Pakistan. These alliances did not disappear postwar and national identity continues to be stronger than gender identity. The implications of the nationalist Bangladeshi identity on a feminist agenda requires thorough investigation, because at stake is the exclusion and othering of women belonging to a different ethnic, religious or national background from the discourses that seek to resist oppressive hegemonic ideologies.

Lastly, this thesis, the film and the written component, should not be perceived as a negative criticism of the Liberation War Museum in Bangladesh. Instead, this exploration offers a unique opportunity for the museum to make its archive more inclusive. Contrary to Sarmila Bose's argument, the events that preceded the 1971 war and the war itself fit the United Nation's definition of genocide. It is not the responsibility

of the war museum to make a case against Bose's argument, nor is it sincere to submit the memories of the 1971 war to selective remembering in which some truths are consciously embellished while others are actively forgotten. A more humane archive would include all stories of all victims and survivors as a step towards healing.

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Appendix 1A



Summary Protocol Form (SPF) University Human Research Ethics Committee

Office of Research – Research Ethics and Compliance Unit: GM 1000 – 514.848.2424 ex. 7481
ethics@alcor.concordia.ca

Important (Faculty, staff, students)

- Approval of a Summary Protocol Form (SPF) must be issued by the University Human Research Ethics Committee (UHREC) prior to beginning any research involving human participants.
- The central UHREC reviews all faculty and staff research, as well as some student research (in cases where the research involves greater than minimal risk). The UHREC, Disciplinary College reviews all minimal risk student research (minimal risk course related research intended solely for pedagogical purposes is reviewed at the Department level).
- Faculty and staff research funds/awards cannot be released until appropriate certification has been obtained. For information regarding the release of faculty and staff research funds/awards please contact the Office of Research. For information regarding the release of graduate student funds/awards please contact the School for Graduate Studies. For information regarding the release of undergraduate student funds/awards please contact the Financial Aid and Awards Office or the Faculty/Department.
- Please submit one signed copy of this form to the UHREC c/o the Research Ethics and Compliance Unit via e-mail at ethics@alcor.concordia.ca. *Please allow at least one month for the central UHREC to complete the review; students should allow at least 14 days for the UHREC, Disciplinary College to complete the review.*
- All research must comply with the [Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans](#), funding/award agency policies and guidelines, applicable law and governmental regulations, as well as the [Official Policies of Concordia University](#) as required.
- Once obtained, the Certificate of Ethical Approval for Research Involving Human Participants is valid for one year and must be renewed on an annual basis throughout the life of the project. This requires the submission of an Annual Report Form before the current approval expires. A project's approval expires automatically if a renewal request is not received before the current approval expires. No research activities

- involving human participants may be conducted under an expired approval.
- For more information regarding the UHREC, UHREC Disciplinary College or the procedures for the ethical review of research involving human participants, please see the *Concordia Policy for the Ethical Review of Research Involving Human Participants*, VPRGS-3 and related *Procedures for the Ethical Review of Research Involving Human Participants* ([Official Policies of Concordia University](#)).

Important (students)

- If your project is encompassed within your supervising faculty member's SPF, your supervisor need only inform the Research Ethics and Compliance Unit via e-mail of your addition to the research team. If your project is an addition to, or an extension of, your supervising faculty member's SPF where a similar methodology is proposed, your supervising faculty member must submit a detailed modification request and any revised documents via e-mail; no new SPF is required.

Instructions

This document is a form-fillable Word document. Please open in Microsoft Word, and tab through the sections, clicking on checkboxes and typing your responses. The form will expand to fit your text. *Handwritten forms will not be accepted.* If you have technical difficulties with this document, you may type your responses and submit them on another sheet. Incomplete or omitted responses may cause delays in the processing of your protocol.

Status:

- ☐ Faculty/staff
- ☒ Graduate student (PhD, Masters)
- ☐ Undergraduate student
- ☐ Postdoctoral fellow

This research (check all that may apply):

- ☐ Is health and/or medical related
- ☐ Is to take place at the PERFORM Center
- ☐ Includes participants under the age of 18 years
- ☐ Includes participants with diminished mental or physical capacity
- ☐ Includes Aboriginal peoples
- ☒ Includes vulnerable individuals or groups (*vulnerability may be caused by limited capacity, or limited access to social goods, such as rights, opportunities and power and includes individuals or groups whose situation or circumstances make them vulnerable in the context of the research project, or those who live with relatively high levels of risk on a daily basis*)
- ☐ Involves controlled goods/technology, hazardous materials and/or explosives, biological/biohazardous materials, or other hazards (radioisotopes, lasers, x-ray equipment, magnetic fields)
- ☒ Is multi-jurisdictional/multi-institutional/multi-centric

1. Submission Information

Please check ONE of the boxes below:

- ☒ This application is for a new protocol.
- ☐ This application is a modification or an update of an existing protocol:
Previous protocol number (s): _____

2. Contact Information

Please provide the requested contact information in the table below:

Principal Investigator/ Instructor	Department	Internal Address	Phone Number	E-mail
Azra Rashid	Communication Studies		514-627-0779	azra.rashid@concordia.ca
Faculty Supervisor (<i>required for student Principal Investigators</i>)		Department / Program		E-mail
Dr. Martin Allor		Communication Studies		martin.allor@concordia.ca
Co-Investigators / Collaborators		University / Department		E-mail
Research Assistants		Department / Program		E-mail

3. Project and Funding Sources

Project Title:	Gender and Genocide: a research-creation project
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In the table below, please list all existing internal and external sources of research funding, and associated information, which will be used to support this project. Please include anticipated start and finish dates for the project(s). Note that for awarded grants, the grant number is REQUIRED. If a grant is an application only, list APPLIED instead.

Funding	Project Title	Grant	Award Period
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Source		Number	Start	End

4. Brief Description of Research or Activity

Please provide a brief overall description/lay summary of the project or research activity. The summary should not contain highly technical terms or jargon and should be in a style similar as to how you would describe your work to an individual without any discipline specific training. *Do not submit your thesis proposal or grant application.*

Genocide, as defined in the Genocide Convention, is an act committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group by killing members of the group and imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group. With genocide defined along the lines of ethnic divide and reproduction, it becomes impossible to focus more or less on ethnicity or gender, as both are markers of asymmetrical social relations and power hierarchy. Across the globe, woman - the marginalized, the 'other' and often far from the mode of production - finds herself represented either as the oppressed or as "feminist". Representation of the "other" is complex, especially when differences within the category are also taken into account. The feminist task is to make visible the difference in experiences and account for them. Such visibility and representation can help demystify the otherness of the marginalized "other" and more specifically of women. I am interested in decoding the existing images of war, seemingly genderless, and providing an alternative study of genocide by making women's experiences central to the discourse on genocide. If the subject of inquiry is the politics of discourse, the silencing, the appropriation and visual representation of women's stories within the existing accounts of genocide, it would be logical to use creative tools to explore that relationship. I am interested in exploring the potential of "creation-as-research" in investigating the lived reality of gender and the multiplicity of gendered experiences of the 1971 genocide in Bangladesh. Using creative tools, my research will document specific experiences of women, which will resist and challenge the gender-neutrality of the memorialized images of war and the universalizing of gendered crimes of genocide. To make visible the gendered experiences and silencing of female survivors of genocide, using "creation-as-research" as methodology, I am documenting women's stories from the 1971 genocide in Bangladesh, which saw hundreds of thousands of people killed and close to 200,000 women raped.

Creation-as-research is research through creation and it entails "investigating the relationship between technology, gathering and revealing through creation ... while also seeking to extract knowledge from the process" (Chapman and Sawchuk 19). In the world of qualitative research, ethnography is widely used to study and interpret cultures. In an ethnographic study, data is collected and studied by a researcher by immersing

herself in a social setting to observe social behaviour. In a similar vein, in Communication Studies data is collected in the form of audio and visual media, which can then be edited to create a documentary film that can offer an understanding into a behavioral, social and cultural phenomenon. The situating of oneself in the research by making clear the researchers' own beliefs and objectives leads to reflexivity in ethnography and similarly in research-creation. Specifically, a reflexive documentary offers accountability for a particular positioning of the camera, the framing of a shot, the focusing in or out, filming a sequence, or editing a sequence. In search for transparency, a reflexive approach highlights the different ways of seeing and the fact that a view from a different angle may depict a different picture altogether. A reflexive documentary is the most ethical way of researching a sensitive subject like genocide because it does not demand conformity, instead it makes room for representation of historical specificity and gender in a trans-national context.

To reiterate, the documentary film, as in any research-creation project, will allow for research to emerge through creation and it will compliment the written component of my dissertation.

5. Scholarly Review / Merit

Has this research been funded by a peer-reviewed granting agency (e.g. CIHR, FQRSC, Hexagram)?

☐ Yes Agency: _____

☒ No If your research is beyond minimal risk (*defined as research in which the probability and magnitude of possible harms implied by participation is no greater than those encountered by participants in those aspects of their everyday life that relate to the research*) please complete and attach the Scholarly Review Form (Scholarly Review Forms for student research may be signed by thesis committee members)

6. Research Participants

a) Please describe the group of people who will participate in this project.

For this project, I will be interviewing Bengali rape survivors, Bihari rape survivors, doctors who performed abortions, war babies who were exported to Canada, women who gave testimonies in war trials, and women who fought alongside the Bengali militia.

b) Please describe in detail how participants will be recruited to participate. Please attach to this protocol draft versions of any recruitment advertising, letters, etcetera which will be used.

For this project, participants are recruited through secondary sources, including local human rights organization “Voices for Interactive Choice and Empowerment” and personal contacts offered by US-based, Prof. Yasmin Saikia who has done tremendous work in Bangladesh. I met the Director of Voices for Interactive Choice and Empowerment in Montreal at a conference and told him about my project. Mr. Swapan, who has provided a letter of support, was not only sympathetic to the cause but also offered to help with finding and recruiting survivors in Bangladesh. He told me that his organization has worked closely with survivors who want to share their stories. In the months that followed, Mr. Swapan continued to support the project, as evidenced by the letter he provided.

During my doctoral exam, I came across a book chapter by Prof. Yasmin Saikia, discussing the silent archives on the 1971 war and documenting women’s stories. In September of this year, I wrote her an email telling her about my project and asked if she might be available to talk with me over skype. She suggested we talk after I read her book “Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh.” After I read her book, we had a long conversation in which I told her about myself and my research project. Prof. Saikia told me that it was an important project and I should pursue it. She also gave me some contacts of people whom she had met while conducting her research in Bangladesh. These people include a journalist and two filmmakers and some NGOs. Following up with these contacts, I sent this email:

Hi there,

My name is Azra Rashid and I am a Montreal-based filmmaker and PhD candidate at Concordia University. I am working on a research project that documents women’s stories from the 1971 liberation war in Bangladesh. I got your contact information from Prof. Yasmin Saikia and I am writing to you today as I am planning a research trip to Bangladesh to interview female survivors of the war – women who witnessed the war from several different vantage points, as rape survivors, fighters, service providers, etc. I am wondering if you might be able to introduce me to women who are willing to share their stories.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,

Azra

In regards to counseling, “Voices for Interactive Choice and Empowerment” has assured me that they can offer those services to the survivors. Additionally, I have also contacted other NGOs, such as Ain-o-Salish Kendra and Safina Lohani of Sirajganj Uttaran Mohila Sangstha to make sure that counseling services are offered to female survivors in case there is a need.

(Please see the attached letter by NGO)

- c) Please describe in detail how participants will be treated throughout the course of the research project. Describe the research procedures, and provide information regarding the training of

researchers and assistants. Include sample interview questions, draft questionnaires, etcetera, as appropriate.

During the course of the interview the participants are expected to share their accounts of the 1971 genocide in Bangladesh. Through asking a series of questions, provided to the committee in the sample questionnaire, the participants will be asked questions that would shed some light on their lives before the genocide, their experiences during the genocide and the reality of life post-genocide. If participants offer to show me their house or the places that are of significance to them, I will accompany them but they will not be asked, nor expected to revisit the physical sites of violence. I anticipate these interviews to be in line with traditional, sit-down interviews, which are often deemed as talking heads in the documentary world.
(Sample Questionnaire provided)

The mentorship of my doctoral studies supervisor, Prof. Martin Allor, and of Prof. Krista Lynes has directly and indirectly prepared me to take on this project at an academic level. In addition to his specialization in Cultural Studies, Media Theory and Analysis, Documentary Studies, and Social Discourse Analysis, Dr. Allor has worked closely with US-based NGO Witness to provide video advocacy training to human rights activists from around the globe. Prof. Krista Lynes specializes in a transnationalist feminist approach to media studies and in making visible feminist political subjects, as well as multiple visions of social life under conditions of duress, political struggle, or human rights abuse. I am working closely with Prof. Allor and Prof. Lynes to ensure that the project is handled with appropriate sensitivity. Outside of academia, I have worked for almost a decade as a Broadcast Journalist and filmmaker often dealing with sensitive topics that required an ethical representation of trauma.

During my undergraduate studies, I was actively involved with the Toronto chapter of Amnesty International and Food and Clothing Bank at my university. After completing my undergraduate degree at the University of Toronto, I completed a post-graduate diploma in Broadcast Journalism at Seneca@York, Toronto, where I also received training in interview methods and filmmaking. In the past, I have worked as a Broadcast Journalist in US, Canada and Pakistan at news organizations, including Democracy Now!, Omni News, CNBC and Dawn News, and as documentary director I have made documentary films on highly sensitive topics that dealt with issues of rape (Dishonour Defied), forced marriages (Unveiling the Abuse), and homelessness (Homeless in Toronto). During the above-mentioned projects, I worked closely with survivors dealing with traumatic memories and helped them in their struggles. ***Dishonour Defied*** is a film about rape and status of women in Pakistan. The film focuses on the story of Mukhtar Mai – a woman who was gang raped on the orders of the tribal council of her village and then paraded naked in her village to exemplify punishment. Unlike many other rape survivors in Pakistan, Mukhtar Mai wanted to fight for justice and she decided to share her story with the world. Dishonour Defied gave her that platform. The film had two broadcasters and a distributor in Canada and it was showcased at many national and international film festivals. The documentary film also received a Silver Remi Award at the WorldFest in Houston. During Dishonour Defied, I helped Mukhtar

Mai in publicizing her case internationally, especially when her passport was confiscated by the Pakistani government. In the months that followed Mukhtar Mai became an international symbol of resistance and helped change the country's draconian rape laws. My film *Unveiling the Abuse* dealt with the issue of forced marriages in Canada and a ten-minute version of the film became part of the curriculum by the Toronto District School Board. During *Unveiling the Abuse*, the main character of the film – a survivor of two forced marriages in Canada – requested that the film not be submitted to any film festivals or broadcasters in Canada as she was concerned about the safety of her daughters and repercussion from her ex-husband. She also wanted the identity of her ex husband hidden in the film. She told me that until her daughters turn 18, the film should only be used in an educational setting to raise awareness. Not only did I agree to her requests but also kept her involved during the post-production to ensure that she feels justly represented in the film. The women I worked with in the above projects had gone through tremendous trauma in their lives and in my projects they felt represented and supported in their struggles. The trust that was established during the process resulted in building allies and friendship through the years.

7. Informed Consent

- a) Please describe how you will obtain informed consent from your participants. A copy of your written consent form or your oral consent script must be attached to this protocol. If oral consent is proposed, please describe how consent will be logged/ recorded. *Please note: written consent forms and oral consent scripts must follow the format and include the same information as outlined on the sample consent form.*

Consent will be obtained by informing the participants about the details of the project and its goals in their native language. The attached ethics consent form will be used and translated by a local female interpreter.

(Please see the attached agreement with the translator)

- b) In some cultural traditions, individualized consent as implied above may not be appropriate, or additional consent (e.g. group consent; consent from community leaders) may be required. If this is the case with your sample population, please describe the appropriate format of consent and how you will obtain it.

This is not the case among my research participants

8. Deception and Freedom to Discontinue

- a) Please describe the nature of any deception, and provide a rationale regarding why it must be used in your protocol. Is deception absolutely necessary for your research design? Please note that deception includes, but is not limited to, the following: deliberate presentation of false information; suppression of material information; selection of information designed to mislead;

selective disclosure of information. Please describe the proposed debriefing procedures post-participation.

Not applicable.

- b) How will participants be informed that they are free to discontinue at any time? Will the nature of the project place any limitations on this freedom (e.g. dissemination and/or publication date)?

Participants will be informed that they can discontinue the interview at any point, should there be a concern. They will also be granted access to the film at various stages of development to decide whether to continue their participation.

9. Risks and Benefits

- a) Please identify any foreseeable benefits to participants.

For the participants, speaking about their experiences from the war means offering testimony and making sure that their stories are not forgotten. In addition to it being a cathartic act, it is also a political act which empowers them

- b) Please identify any foreseeable risks or potential harms to participants. This includes low-level risk or any form of discomfort resulting from the research procedure. When appropriate, indicate arrangements that have been made to ascertain that subjects are in “healthy” enough condition to undergo the intended research procedures. Include any “withdrawal” criteria.

Revisiting a traumatic memory can trigger a painful reliving of the experience, which may result in an emotional response. Additionally, there may be repercussions from their community for sharing their story.

- c) Please indicate how the risks identified above will be minimized. Also, if a potential risk or harm should be realized, what action will be taken? Please attach any available list of referral resources, if applicable.

The risk will be minimized through creating an environment of trust and respect, by making the participants incharge of the interview and giving them freedom to discontinue, and also through access to NGOs that are introducing the participants to me.

- d) Is there a likelihood of unanticipated “heinous discovery” (e.g. disclosure of child abuse, revelation of crime) or “incidental finding” (e.g. previously undiagnosed medical or psychiatric condition) outside of the intended scope of the research that could have significant welfare implications for the participant or other parties, whether health-related, psychological or social? If so, how will such a discovery be handled?

Note that in exceptional and compelling circumstances, researchers may be subject to obligations to report information to authorities to protect the health, life or safety of a participant or a third party (TCPS2, Article 5.1) Note that if, in the course of the research, incidental findings are discovered, researchers have an obligation to inform the participant (TCPS2, Article 3.4).

The participants will be encouraged to recall their experiences during the war, which may or may not be something publicly or privately rehearsed by the participant. However, a discovery of abuse will be within the scope of the research. Survivors will have access to resources and NGOs to deal with the trauma. Please see the list attached.

10. Data Access and Storage

- a) Please describe what access research participants will have to study results, and any debriefing information that will be provided to participants post-participation.

The participants will be able to view the film at various stages of development through password protected websites such as vimeo. The participants will be able to gauge their involvement with the project as it progresses.

- b) Please describe the path of your data from collection to storage to its eventual archiving or disposal. Include specific details on short and long-term storage (format and location), who will have access, and final destination (including archiving, or any other disposal or destruction methods).

The data will be stored on a password protected hard drive. No one other than myself will have access to the data during post-production. Upon completion, the film will be archived alongwith my dissertation as per university policy.

11. Confidentiality of Results

Please identify what access you, as a researcher, will have to your participant(s) identity(ies):

<input type="checkbox"/>	Fully Anonymous	Researcher will not be able to identify who participated at all. Demographic information collected will be insufficient to identify individuals.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Anonymous results, but identify who participated	The participation of individuals will be tracked (e.g. to provide course credit, chance for prize, etc) but it would be impossible for collected data to be linked to individuals.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pseudonym	Data collected will be linked to an individual who will only be identified by a fictitious name / code. The researcher will not know the “real” identity of the participant.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Confidential	Researcher will know “real” identity of participant, but this identity will not be disclosed.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Disclosed	Researcher will know and will reveal “real” identity of participants in results / published material.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Participant Choice	Participant will have the option of choosing which level of disclosure they wish for their “real” identity.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please describe)	

- a) If your sample group is a population in which the revelation of their identity could be particularly sensitive, please describe any special measures that you will take to respect the wishes of your participants regarding the disclosure of their identity.

The participants will be given the option of whether or not they want to be filmed, as outlined in the consent form.

If the participant requests that her identity be hidden, the interview will be shot to ensure anonymity, by shooting away from her face or by shooting silhouette. Additionally, the voice of the participant can also be altered in post-production.

- b) In some research traditions (e.g. action research, research of a socio-political nature) there can be concerns about giving participant groups a “voice”. This is especially the case with groups that have been oppressed or whose views have been suppressed in their cultural location. If these concerns are relevant for your participant group, please describe how you will address them in your project.

My research offers an alternative reading of genocide by making women's experiences central to the existing nationalistic & patriarchal discourses. The women interviewed will not be asked to embody their entire nation; they will only speak for themselves

12. Additional Comments

- a) Bearing in mind the ethical guidelines of your academic and/or professional association, please comment on any other ethical concerns which may arise in the conduct of this protocol (e.g. responsibility to subjects beyond the purposes of this study).
- b) If you have feedback about this form, please provide it here.

13. Signature and Declaration

Following approval from the UHREC, a protocol number will be assigned. This number must be used when giving any follow-up information or when requesting modifications to this protocol.

The UHREC will request annual status reports for all protocols, one year after the last approval date.

I hereby declare that this Summary Protocol Form accurately describes the research project or scholarly activity that I plan to conduct. Should I wish to make minor modifications to this research, I will submit a detailed modification request or in the case of major modifications, I will submit an updated copy of this document via e-mail to the Research Ethics and Compliance Unit for review and approval.

ALL activity conducted in relation to this project will be in compliance with:

- [The Tri Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans](#)
- **The policies and guidelines of the relevant funding agency**
- The [Official Policies of Concordia University](#)

Principal Investigator Signature: _____ Azra Rashid _____

Date: __November 28, 2013_____

Faculty Supervisor Statement (required for student Principal Investigators):

I have read and approved this project. I affirm that it has received the appropriate academic approval, and that the student investigator is aware of the applicable policies and procedures governing the ethical conduct of human participant research at Concordia University. I agree to provide all necessary supervision to the student. I allow release of my nominative information as required by these policies and procedures in relation to this project.

Faculty Supervisor Signature: _____ Martin Allor _____

Date: __November 28, 2013_____

Appendix 1B: Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN *GENDER AND GENOCIDE: A RESEARCH-CREATION PROJECT*

I understand that I have been asked to participate in a research project being conducted by Azra Rashid of Communication Studies department of Concordia University, azra.rashid@concordia.ca, 514-627-0779; under the supervision of Dr. Martin Allor of Communication Studies department of Concordia University, (514) 848-2424 ext. 2548, martin.allor@concordia.ca.

A. PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is to study the role of gender in the 1971 genocide in Bangladesh by documenting the stories of female survivors.

B. PROCEDURES

I understand that as part of the research I have been asked for an interview and, if agreed, a video recording of my interview will be made, which will show my image, likeness, performances, acts, appearances, and the sound recordings of my voice. I also understand that the interview does not have a set time limitation as such and it will end immediately upon my request. I understand that the interview will be conducted at a location of my choice. I also understand that the counseling services from the NGO are independent of my participation in this project.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

I understand the risk of revisiting traumatic events from my past and making known facts that may have been private and confidential in the past. I understand that if needed at any point during, before, or after the interview counseling can be requested and provided. I also understand the benefits of giving testimony in the process of healing and in broadening the understanding of gendered crimes of genocide.

D. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at anytime before, during and after the interview up until publication without negative consequences, in which case the data will be discarded
- I allow _____, or do not allow _____, a recording to be made of my audio for transcription only;
- I want my interview to be filmed _____ or not filmed _____.
- I want my identity to be shown _____ or concealed _____.
- I want my voice to be used as is _____ or altered _____.
- I understand that the video from this study may be edited, juxtaposed with any other video or film footage, and published and distributed.
- All data will be destroyed, i.e. digital files will be deleted permanently and documents shredded after five years

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

If at any time you have questions about the proposed research, please contact the study's Principal Investigator, Azra Rashid, Department of Communication Studies, Concordia University, azra.rashid@concordia.ca, 514-627-0779, or Dr. Martin Allor, Department of Communication Studies, Concordia University, (514) 848-2424 ext. 2548, martin.allor@concordia.ca

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics and Compliance Advisor, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 ethics@alcor.concordia.ca

Appendix 1C

Sample Questionnaire

What is your first memory as a child?

Tell me about your education. Did you go to a formal institution or were you home schooled?

How was the relationship between your parents?

How was your family's relationship to your neighbours?

Did your parents ever discuss politics at home? If so, do you recall their views?

How did you relate to your parents' views as a child?

Where were you when the floods of 1970 hit Bangladesh?

How did you experience the war of liberation in 1971?

How did your family experience the war?

What are some of the things you saw during the war?

Are you able to give me an idea of what happened to women during the war?

How did you feel when Bangladesh gained independence from Pakistan?

Can you talk about your personal experience soon after the war?

Can you talk about some of the things you saw happening after the war?

What resources were available to women after the physical and mental trauma of the war?

Did you ever consider testifying in the war trials?

Can you talk about how your life was ten years after the war?

After the war, did you need or seek any kind of help or emotional counseling?

After the war, how did you support yourself financially?

Can you talk about your personal life and relationships now?

What was your relationship like to the idea of “Bengal nation” before the war? Did it change after the war?

Appendix 2A

Interview Excerpts: Pratiti Devi & Aroma Dutta

Pratiti Devi: Socially, culturally... Best (place) was East Pakistan; not East Pakistan, East Bengal. *Speaks in Bangla*

Aroma Dutta: She is saying that the country, she cherished at that time was extremely non-communal; it was such a secular place. I mean, it was the land filled with songs and beauty of the people. I mean... And she lived in Comilla. So the people were also very nice and it was a center of culture. *Speaks in Bengali*

Pratiti Devi: *Speaks in Bangla*

Aroma Dutta: The society, she is saying, the land now, I mean, has turned absolutely what she never dreamt of. It's like, the peace, the harmony, the beauty, all has disappeared. And it's like a myth. I mean, the world where she lived compared to the world where she is living is nothing which can be compared.

My grandfather Dhirendranath Dutta was a congressman. And he was a very renowned local leader who became a national leader during that period, during the British period. And he was the deputy leader of the house of United India. And in 47, when the country was divided into India and Pakistan, he being a minority and because of his very strong stand, he was chosen as the first chief minister of West Bengal. But then he declined. He said, no, that's not where I belong. I belong to this soil. Mount Batten repeatedly warned him, "Mr. Dutta, you are making the biggest mistake of your life." And then he said, "let me embrace that mistake and return to my homeland." And then he opted for Pakistan. And interestingly, Pakistan started with two constituent assembly members originally: one is Mr. Mohammad Ali Jinnah and the second person is Dhirendranath Dutta. He never accepted this division because the division was based on the basis of religion. And at that time, Pakistan, East Pakistan had more people speaking Bangla language. So, in the first constituent assembly, which was held in Karachi in 1948, in the month of February, in the very first session, Mr. Dhirendranath Dutta gave a very historic speech. And that is something very significant, which is the start of the liberation war. He demanded Bangla should be one of the state language because it is the language of the majority. Then and then Mr. Liaqat Ali Khan rebuked him and said, "Mr. Dutta, you are trying to break Pakistan. And for that we will not spare you." And at that time, I mean, there about almost, almost 38 per cent, more than 38 per cent, Hindus were inhabitants in East Pakistan. And what could hold us together? Will religion hold us together? No. It's the language. And it's the Bangla language. And then and then, the whole, the entire students of Dhaka University, Dhaka Medical College, cherished Dhirendranath Dutta's speech and started this whole Bangla language movement. When his ministry was over, the armies had taken over in 58, he moved to Comilla – this is where we are from – because that was his base. He used to practice at the Comilla bar. After the 70 election, when Awami League had that majority then the whole problem again cropped up and

Butto wouldn't let go. Bhutto along with Yahya was trying not to hand over the power to the elected party and the row started from then on. On 25th March, the talks failed, the dialogue failed and on 25th March the crackdown had taken place. On the 29th night, around two in the morning, the Pakistani armies came and then had like kept us from seeing them; was taking them away and at one point they came and asked me, who is the person, where is the person who studies at Dhaka University? And by slip of tongue, I said, no, I don't study at Dhaka University, and I know they were asking me and I just told them by slip of tongue but also to a certain extent, I was trying to defend myself. But they were actually trying to keep us away while the operation was going on. And after about 40 minutes, they left. I thought they had taken my grandfather but I was looking for my uncle. They had taken them both. The father and son were picked up by the Pakistani armies. They were brutally tortured and killed in the Mainamati Cantonment and was thrown in some hills, inside some hills. We never got their dead bodies. Luckily they did not see young women, and my mother was also quite young. They did not touch us at that time. They spared us. I do not know why they had spared us. Because we were renown as a political family, they did not touch us till that point. And we managed to flee from the house day after and we were hiding in some of our friends' house. On the 2nd of April, we heard a word because everybody was trying to listen to BBC and also Australian Radio and Indian Radio. At that point we heard that Mrs. Gandhi had made a condolence in the parliament, in Lok Sabha, on behalf of my grandfather; said that he was picked up and martyred. And because he was a renowned national politician, so a minute condolence, you know, silence was observed. And the place where we were hiding, the family with whom we were hiding, they came and told us that they cannot keep us any longer because now it's open and the armies are now searching us from house to house and they will just pick us up. And they do not know what is going to happen to us. That is one issue but they also will kill them. So, that's it. You have to leave the country right now once the curfew is lifted. So, we managed to get some Burkas. My mother did hide and I did hide in two Burkas. Along with my brother, they managed to cross the border, managed to cross us the border to India, to the closest border in Comilla. In Tripura, it's called Shona Moore. We were taken to the Shona Moore Thana Office and this is how our refugee life started and we lost, we lost everything – our identity, our existence.

I am part and parcel of that and I am one of the very proud women who has suffered. But I am a warrior. And I will continue to fight and I feel very proud to be a member of the martyr family. Again, I say it because this is the soil I own. I have owned this soil. And that's it.

The war hasn't finished. The 71 war is still ongoing.

Appendix 2B

Interview Excerpts: Saira Bano

My name is Saira Bano. When the Hindu-Muslim riots started, that's when I came to Dhaka. I was young, this big (raises her arm to signify the size of a child). I don't have much memory of that. I used to beg for money, that's when a man abducted me. I was crying. People to help me, so he let me go. I remember that time a little. I used to beg for food. Mom, dad, the whole family was in India, in Calcutta. Now, they are all dead. No one is around anymore. No sign of them has remained. My son also died in India. I don't have anyone in this world, except for myself, the people at the camp, and Allah. That's it.

The chairman here, Kareem Mama, I deliver water to his house. They give me a little money and I am able to afford tea with that. I like drinking tea a lot. If I don't drink tea, I won't fetch water. Even if I don't have any rice to eat, I still need tea. I don't have a stove and there is no door where I live. I don't have money to get those things. I just have a blanket, that's what I use. I sleep up there (points to a little space on the floor up some stairs). I feel cold sleeping down here. I burn wood to cook. That's all, I don't have anything else to say. I have told you everything I had to say. You can see my condition. Even in this condition, I work as a masseuse. I give massages to women from the upper class. They tell me not to work, but I still give them massages. I clean their houses too. They really take care of me. They are Bengali women.

Do you know, I fetch five pots of water per house? Five pots or four. From morning till midnight. My whole body shivers. My body shivers, but I still fetch water. I really like the CRO (refugee camp). They tell me not to fetch water. We will provide for you (audibly getting emotional). But I don't listen to anyone. They all try to stop me. Everyone at the CRO camp. They say, we will give you food, clothes, money, everything. I don't listen to them. If I have to fetch water, then I will fetch water. Fetching water has bruised my hands. Look at my arms (Stretches out her arm and shows her bruises). But I still don't listen. They all care for me at the CRO camp. They want to give me food. But I don't listen. I cook on this stove here (Points to the stove). Whatever I can manage, I cook and eat. That's it. I feel embarrassed to ask for bread or rice all the time. I don't even have a proper home. Whatever donation I received during the month of Ramadan I used it to put these walls. (crying) I can't do any work because both my legs hurt, my back hurts, arms hurt. Look at how my arms are bruised from fetching water. It's all swollen (shows her arms again). My ankles are swollen (shows her ankle). I don't tell anyone. What's the point.

I don't know about anyone. My daughter lives in Pakistan. My son went to India and died there. My husband died here in the war. I have no one. I really like the CRO camp. They care for me a lot. Whatever is my destiny... I will die soon. It's time for me to die. That's all. There is nothing else. Who is and isn't in India, I don't know. Whether they are alive or dead, I don't know. I came to the CRO camp during the war. I was young then. Now I am old.

Donations by the people at the camp helped me arrange my daughter's wedding. When my husband died, their donations helped with the funeral. Now I am left. When I die, they will arrange my funeral too. Through donations. And nothing else. I don't have any other problems, Miss.

I couldn't get a home. I came here when I was young; now I am old. But no one gave me a home. No one gave me a home. With whatever money I received in charity, I put this shack together. This is where I sleep. To this day, no one gave me a home. People received luxurious homes, but I got nothing.

Appendix 2C

Interview Excerpts: Ferdousi Priyubhashini

I am Ferdousi Priyubhashini. I got married in 64. By 71, I was 15 plus 5... 20 years old. By the age 20, I already had three children. I fell in love with that boy. But it was a wrong choice – a mistake. I had three children. I struggled a lot. I had to get a job. I was only 17 years old when I joined by first job at the Jute mill. I went for the job interview, leaving behind my six day old baby. Gradually, I matured by doing this work and being mother of three children. The 25th of March arrived. My divorce was being negotiated with my first husband. I was afraid of letting him go because he would take away my children. I was unable to live without my children so I said to him, “Okay, stay with me. I don’t have a relationship with you, but you can stay.” Still he wouldn’t leave me alone. He would argue with me, and physically abuse me, and al these things. The night of 25th March, I became alone. My husband left home with the children. There was fire all around. There was so much fire that I couldn’t see. The fire was a bit far, but it seemed like it was in my house. While running for safety, we passed through a cemetery. The place was filled with dead bodies. I stepped on a dead body. I kept running. Then I couldn’t run anymore. It’s a tragedy, nobody gave shelter. I didn’t know what I was going to do. Then I slowly walked to a shelter. This was a temporary shelter. Then a question arose about me. I was a bit younger. The wife complained, “Why is she staying here? She has three children and a husband.” They didn’t know I had separated from my husband. She suspected something illicit between her husband and I. She said some bad words. I got to know later on. Then I thought I must leave in the morning anyhow. When I first reached the office, I faced some terrible circumstances. I sensed a raping attitude in every man. Literally everyone. The general manage, Mr. Fidai, who had hired me, said, “I will not allow you to go outside the mill.” I could not understand that I had been put under surveillance. The mill was a booth to help the army. The army officers used to come there and make their requirements. He (Mr. Fidai) used to send me all the time. Mr. Fidai collaborated with the army officers and handed me over to them. ...

Mr. Fidai said, “There is a killing charge against you.” By framing this complain that I killed someone, they chased me for a whole nine months period. I was send to the circuit house in Jessore, then in Khulna. Everyday I had to receive and entertain 1 or 2 army officers. I had to. I cannot describe this brutality anymore. I think, you can understand it. They used to bring girls from village after village and rape them. Once a girl named Protima, our gardener’s daughter, said, “Sister, could you please give me shelter for one night? I will leave in the morning.” I told her that I could not give her shelter. I was unable to tell her that I myself was going through a dangerous situation. Protima was crying and cursing me as she walked away by saying, “You haven’t given me shelter. I used to work in your house.” I could see how her blouse was tattered and torn. I used to hear about rape incidents there every day. But the victims didn’t see each other. So, I knew how women were being raped, including myself. Around 7 or 8 in the evening, an officer came in to see me. He addressed me as “Mohtarma” (meaning, Lady). It was the first time an officer showed respect. He asked, “Mohtarma, how are you?” I said, “See for yourself how I am.” He said, “you have to go to the concentration camp.” I asked,

“What do you mean by concentration camp?” He said, “It is a punishment cell for those who have committed gross offence and women who helped criminals. It also serves the purpose of entertaining soldiers of the general infantry. Do you want to fall into the hands of the soldiers, or do you want to confess that you killed the professor?” The major who was talking to me seemed kind. So, I said to him, “Look at my face, do I look like an assassin?” I was kept in the concentration camp for 28 hours. I shuddered at what I saw there. I had a sudden urge to strangle myself using my Saree. There were rows of rooms in a line. The women had been brought there from villages. Some were drunk. Some of the women were crying, some asked in desperation if they would ever go back. Half mad, half in their senses, some women had adjusted to the situation. A woman was sipping tea and talking to the soldiers. I wished I could do the same and come to terms with reality. Major Altaf said, just wait, I will release you. There were certain procedures to follow. I was taken to Brigadier Hyat where I had to sign a paper. The paper said that I was not free of the offence and I was to report from time to time. So during the 28 hours in the concentration camp, I was tortured and raped repeatedly. The officer who saved me, asked one day, how attached are you to your children? I want to propose a marriage to you. I will take you with me. After the war is over, you will face social rejection. Things will get worse for you.” I said, “I can’t marry you. Marry a Pakistani army officer? After Bangladesh is liberated, my neighbours will know that I have absconded with a Pakistani army officer. Can you imagine the humiliation? The way I have survived the brutalities over the nine months, it is unthinkable to marry a Pakistani. I can’t do it on moral ground. I can’t betray my nation. I can’t be impulsive.” One December 16th, we saw the end of the war. The freedom fighters were coming home. I said, I would go back to work. So I went back to the Jute mill. In the meantime, the workers came in hordes and broke the glass windows of the office. They said, she can’t work here. She had been seen going with the army in their car. They were using abusive language. Some said, the army have used her, now hand her over to us. This is difficult for me to describe. Bangladesh was now an independent country, but I was not being allowed to live here. There were two elderly men who came forward and said, let her go. My body was in such a state, I couldn’t bear the slightest touch, let alone the tug and pull. So I said, please don’t touch me. I am leaving. That’s when I called my friend, now my husband and told him, it is my misfortune that you are my only refuge and I have to return to you. He said, forget everything and let us get married. I had faced various social adversities. So, I simply rejected the society. I slowly got into my hobbies – gardening and making artefacts from tree roots. And that’s how I got into making sculptures using rejected materials. Gradually life got better. I saw the war, bore the burnt. Maybe I didn’t take up the gun and fight, but I fought with that time. Is it not part of the war to live in the concentration camp? I have been raped. Was that not part of the liberation war? I don’t feel comfortable to become freedom fighter because I did not fight with a weapon or anything. I think I am a rape victim. A birangona.

Appendix 2D

Interview Excerpts: Sultana Kamal

I was named Sultana and this name was taken from Begum Rokeya's, or Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain's fantasy *Sultana's Dream*, where Sultana, the protagonist, dreams of a world or a land, which is "ladyland" where women have not only equal rights but they rule. ...

We were engaged in seeing that how we can form a team that will be working to at least get rid of the Pakistani army from this territory. So that was the time when we came to know that the liberation force is being formed. People started contacting my mother for different kinds of support within the country, like exchange of information, collecting funds and other resources. So that is how we started and in June we were advised to leave the country, cross the border. We met a doctor who my sister knew from her work in the 1970 tornado, post-tornado situation. He was actually contacting a small medical center for the injured people. And that was the beginning of our work on the other side of the border and also we tried to build a hospital in Sonamura, Agartala and ultimately in July we were able to build that hospital with more than probably 100 beds for the wounded people, as I said maybe freedom fighters or any other person who were attacked or injured by the Pakistani army. ...

The leadership in the war also had a particular idea of men's role and women's role. Like we were immediately engaged to build a hospital and run the hospital rather than them thinking that we could be trained in arms to really fight the guerrilla warfare. But that didn't stop us, many of us, from doing that because many of our friends or relatives living inside the territory at that time, they were keepers of arms, they allowed the guerrilla fighters to kind of, you know, come into their place and they did all that they could do to assist the guerrilla fighters, but then again, yes, unfortunately, it was always assisting, not doing the thing on their own; they were not allowed to do that. So, that particular idea of what a man could do or what a woman could do was very much there. ...

In the beginning, women were only mentioned in the history of liberation war as victims of war – victims of social, I am sorry, victims of sexual harassment or rape. It took quite some time for the social leadership to recognize that women were also doing equal work with their male counterparts during the liberation war. For us it was easy because our family was known to be a freedom fighter's family. But there were many other women who actually fought in many other ways who were not actually, you know, were not looked for in the beginning; when they were looked for there were many lapses in the process and that's why many many female freedom fighters were not even mentioned anywhere in the history or any discourse. ...

Now it has become much more open because of the media, because of the change in the mindset of the people also - that we really have to recognize these people. And I actually claim that the women were the main force inside the country who resisted all the

pressures by the Pakistani army. So, I think, they should be recognized as real freedom fighters. ...

We can hear clearly ringing in our ears Begum Rokeya saying that sisters, rise up and say with your hand on your chest that we are also human beings.

Appendix 3A

Eyeless in the Urn by Sanjib Datza

Do not go to death
Beaten on those fours.
Rise, show a man yet,
A vertical course,
Hands above the dog
For the sole difference.
Let the dead dialogue
Keep the live pretence,
Father!

Do not own the shame
Angled at the knees.
From the dust reclaim
That hind leg, piss,
For no reason bar to flush
The planet, for fard
And faeces fair, wash
Filth, the first of word,
Father!

Do not look back to see
What is left to good
Or ill bent on happy
Ending underfoot.
There are words dying
But not with you. Leave
No bone, meat or meaning
Spelt to please, plaintive,
Father!

Do not ape pity,
pretener's quinsy
Death forges unanimity
Of sleep and urgency,
By the beard of death, spit
On the pity of it,
Father!

Do not permit heart
Splitting hair, the hired deal.
Pluck from the very part
At war with will

That opposes by more
Than the while but less
Than the least you are. Score
By a start undress,
Father!

Do not accept end
In mitigation
Of facts not to mend.
One revolution
Or half a cycle
Might change place as of
Stars and the sickle
Shearing the sheaves off,
Father!

Do not turn to birth
Again, the cycle turned.
For once, one pain to fecund
Aeons, is enough.
Better not a thing
Spun of the spindle, distaff,
Ever. Spurn the charmed ring,
Father!

Do not forgive, dead or
Re-dressed, bare or bandaged, do not.
Dear the tensor
Of time stretched taut
Across the waste of space
No shelter might assuage.
Harrow hell, wrack, raze,
Face the foe, avenge,
Father!